
BAPTIST ORIGINS AND HISTORY

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I first discussed the Theological training project with **Bishop Lewis Lucea** in 2002 he emphasised the need for clergy of the ICPICCJC who were in formation (i.e.; training) to be thoroughly appraised in the history of Christian sects and cults. In the Philippines, where Theological education is still varied in its existence and effectiveness, it is easy for dollar backed North American based cults to make inroads into the Christian Faith, not least because of widespread discontent generated by Roman Catholicism. The same was true of other denominations. Why did they arise? How? When? The course in front of you is one of many that we have put together over the years to contribute to the meeting of **Bishop Lucea's** and now **Archbishop Dayagbil's** requirements. It is about the Baptist Church, and in particular its origins and history. Its units are contributed entirely by Baptist scholars – you are hearing from the people themselves about themselves and their own history. Any ordinands already well grounded in ICPICCJC Ecclesiology, and in Biblical Studies and Biblical Hermeneutics will find this course beneficial. The Baptist story is told and its case made, but, to an ICPICCJC eye, it is quite unconvincingly. One of the things that the ordinand can be encouraged to do as he or she listens to this material is to make an ICPICCJC response after each unit. This can form a basis for internal discussion amongst students on a course, but also for ministry interaction with Baptists in the ongoing context of ministry.

The course units originated in the University of Oxford, England, during Michaelmas Term 2009. **Professor John Briggs**, Emeritus Professor of Chemistry in the University of Hull, England and a one time (Lay) President of the English Baptist Union commissioned a series of evening lectures under the auspices of the Oxford Centre for Baptist Origins and History of which he was the outgoing and Founding Director. He invited Baptist scholars from within the United Kingdom to contribute, and designed the overall framework. We in the ICPICCJC are grateful to the Oxford Centre for making their material available to us. Unit 1 on Baptist Origins and early Theology of Baptism was contributed by **Dr Anthony Cross B.A.** (Bristol), **M.Th.** (Cardiff, Wales), **Ph.D.**(Keele); Unit 3 on Baptist Hermeneutics by **Dr Stephen Holmes** Senior Lecturer in Systematic Theology at Saint Andrews' University, Scotland U.K.; Unit 4 on Baptist Eschatology by **Dr Crawford Gribben** Senior Lecturer in early modern Print Culture at Trinity College, University of Dublin, Eire; Unit 5 is contributed by **Dr Bryan Haymes** and studies **Thomas Helwy's** *The Mystery of Iniquity* whilst asking how far his work is relevant to today; and finally in unit 6 **Professor Paul Fiddes D.D.** (Oxon.) looks at to what extent the first and today's Baptists may legitimately be labelled 'church' or 'sect' in the light of **Troeltsch, Weber, and Durkheim's** insights. We hope this course will do something to inform you as to how the Baptist movement started and give you something of who they really are. But a word of warning. Baptism can be a divisive issue. None of us want it to be, so enjoy this course, but bear in mind that Baptists are good friends of ours within the body of Christ on earth, even if their Theologies of initiation and Church government are quite different from our own.

The Bishops of the ICPICCJC pray for you as you worship, study, talk, and pray, and become equipped for the Lord's work.

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COURSE PRE-REQUISITES

This is a Level 6 Bachelor or Level 7 Master Course. A fluent grasp of technical and Theological English is necessary, and it would be very desirable if participants had completed PICC B.A./B.D./B.Min course ‘Themes in Reformation Church History,’ ‘The Church of the Elizabethan Settlement,’ or the PICC Foundation/Formation Course ‘Revival in the Historical Development of Christianity’, particularly Units 2A, 2B, 3A and 3B.

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UNIT 1: THE ADOPTION OF BELIEVER'S BAPTISM & BAPTIST BEGINNINGS

A. INTRODUCTION

1A. Introduction to Unit 1 and its tutor Dr Anthony Cross

1. Introduction to Unit 1's author Dr. Anthony Cross by Dr. Wood

Good evening ladies and gentlemen! I think we will make a beginning, at least with the usual announcements. It is my pleasure again to welcome you here to Regents' Park College and to this series of lectures which is being jointly sponsored by the centre for Christianity and Culture and the Centre for Baptist History and Heritage. I am sorry that I wasn't able to be here for the beginning of the series myself last week, but its my great pleasure to be able to introduce a new colleague to you for this unit, **Dr. Anthony Cross**, who is the new director for the centre of Baptist History and Heritage. Anthony is both an Historian and a Theologian, and I suspect those emphases will be apparent in what he wants to share with us. He trained for the Baptist Ministry at Bristol and South Wales Colleges and studied at the Universities of Bristol, University College Cardiff, and the University of Keele. For some years he was a Baptist minister in Cambridge and in Wiltshire, England; and from 1998-2001 he was a Research Fellow in the Centre for Advanced Theological Research at Roehampton in London. In 2003 he was appointed as one of the early fellows in the Centre for Baptist History and Heritage and this year he succeeded our colleague **Professor John Briggs** who helped to put this series together as the Director of the Centre. If you look at the bookstall at the back you will see that he has been prolific as an author and as an editor contributing numerous chapters and articles and editing and authoring twelve or thirteen different books. His particular interests are in the Theology and Practice of Baptism, and Evangelical Sacramentalism, so it is particularly appropriate that he is going to lecture to us on those themes tonight.

2. Notices about the Course (U.K.)

Before he does so, and in case some people slip away at the end before he has finished, a couple of the usual notices. First of all a number of you have already, I know, signed up to our 'Friends' scheme. If you would like to do that, leaflets are at the back as is also a sign up sheet in case you would like to be on our contact list for various events including lectures, book launches, and other things that may be happening. There is at the back a newsletter which is also available electronically, so if you don't want to be cluttered by paper, we will happily clutter up your in-box for you instead. Do please have a look at the bookstall at the end. There are bargains to be had – 30% off all the Paternoster Books on sale, and there are other books from the Regents' Study Guide series as well. So please do have a look before you go. Now it's my pleasure to welcome Anthony to give a lecture entitled, 'The Adoption of Believer's Baptism and Baptist Beginnings.' Thank you very much.

2A. Setting the scene: SMYTH & HELWYS: Founding Baptist fathers

1. Dates of Smyth and Helwys

The beginnings of the Baptist movement are intimately bound up with the lives and traits of two Englishmen from the East Midlands: **John Smyth** born around **1570** and died in **1612**; and

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Thomas Helwys born around **1575** and died in **1615 or 1616**. It is right to view both **Smyth** and **Helwys** as the Baptist founding fathers.

2. A short Ministerial biography of JOHN SMYTH

Smyth was born in Sturton the Steeple, Nottinghamshire, studied at the University of Cambridge from **1586** to **1598** receiving his B.A. and M.A. and was then made a fellow of Christ's College from **1594** to **1598**. Whilst at Cambridge he was tutored by the Separatist **Francis Johnson**, later the Pastor of the Ancient Church which comprised English exiles in Amsterdam but which had been founded in **1587** in London. **Smyth** was ordained as a priest in the Church of England in **1594** and appointed City Lecturer in Lincoln in **1600**, despite his getting into trouble with the university three years earlier. He was removed from this office in **1602**, his license to preach was revoked the following year, around which time he moved to Gainsborough some fifteen miles from Lincoln where in **1606** he was prosecuted for unlawfully preaching in public. Much less is known about **Helwys**.

3. A summary of known early biographical details about HELWYS

Helwys was born into a wealthy family at Bilborough near Nottingham. He inherited the family's home Brockstow Hall, and studied law at Gray's Inn London from **1597**. His cousin Gervais was knighted by **James I** in **1603** and became Lieutenant of the Tower of London.

B. SMYTH'S UNDERSTANDING OF BAPTISM

1B. Literary Sources

1. SMYTH: *The Bright Morning Star* and *A Pattern of True Prayer*

By **1606** **Smyth** had published two works, a series of sermons on *Psalm 22* called, 'The Bright Morning Star,' written in **1603**; and a defence of his own teaching, *A Pattern of True Prayer*, in **1605**, although at this stage he had not separated from the Church of England. The Separation occurred with the founding of the Gainsborough Scruby Separatist Church most likely in **1606**. As a result of the persecution of Separatists, this congregation emigrated to the Netherlands (Holland).

2. A recently discovered Presentment Bill.

At this point I am just going to add this document (the speaker showed it). This is the 'Presentment Bill'. It is tangential to what we are talking about, but it's quite an exciting document. It is the presentment bill relating to **Mr Thomas Helwys**, and Joan his wife. It is dated **11th March 1608**, and it is a document that **Dr Larry Kreitzer** who is giving our next unit discovered a few days ago. As far as we know it's a document unknown previously to Baptist historians. It is the presentment of **Helwys** and his wife to the Bashford Parish for non-attendance at Worship, and it's just a document which shows the kind of persecution that they and other separatists experienced which led to their emigration to the Netherlands where they hoped they would be able to worship in freedom. It's really exciting because increasingly more and more documents like this are becoming unearthed and coming into the public realm.

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Historians, Baptist and others, are taking note of them and revising our understanding of the past accordingly. So this is just a bit of excitement of Larry's discovery on my part.

3. SMYTH's writings in the context of his 'denominational pilgrimage'

Smyth's writings were published over an eleven year period, and represent all four stages of his Theological Pilgrimage from Puritan Priest in the Church of England; then as Pastor of the Separatist Congregation, first in England and then in exile in the Netherlands; then he was Pastor of the first Baptist congregation in Amsterdam; and finally after this Baptist congregation split, from **1610** he led the larger group as they sought membership with the Waterlander Mennonites.

4. SMYTH: 'Parallels, ...' (1609) and 'The Character of the Beast' (1609)

The principal sources of this paper's discussion of Smyth's understanding of Baptism are two books published according to the Separatist **Henry Ainsworth** only a few days after each other in **1609**. Therefore it is almost certain that both were published during **Smyth's** Baptist days. These two works are supplemented by earlier and later sources which reveal the development of **Smyth's** thinking. The first of **Smyth's** **1609** books, '*Parallels, Censures, Observations*,' is a predominantly separatist work containing three letters written to **Smyth** in **1606** and **1607** along with his replies to them. As was common at the time, these original letters and the replies from **Smyth** are interspersed, and were eventually published in one volume when **Smyth** had adopted 'Believer's Baptism'. His principal Baptist work, and the one that deals most extensively with 'Believer's Baptism' is, *The Character of the Beast*. Like, *Parallels ...*, the earlier **1609** work, *The Character of the Beast* is a composite work.

5. Correspondence with the Revd. Richard Clifton.

Sometime after the adoption of 'Believer's Baptism,' the newly formed Baptist congregation sent two of its members, **Edward Southhurst** and **Hugh Bromhead** to **Richard Clifton** as they had heard that, in **Clifton's** own words, 'He had been inclined towards their views.' **Clifton** was a former Rector of Babworth before he joined the Gainsborough Scruby Separatists, and its possible that he had either been a member of the Smith Congregation or had nearly joined them. **Clifton** then talked with another member of the Smith congregation, **Ursula Bywater**, and this led to **Smyth** sending **Clifton** a letter comprising two propositions: each supported by three arguments. The two propositions are: (1) that infants are not to be baptised; (2) that anti-Christians converted are to be admitted into the true Church by baptism. **Clifton** replied at length. (I am using the new style calendar, that is the Gregorian calendar so I have updated accordingly). **Clifton** replied at length on the **25th March 1609**, and **Smyth's** reply was finished by **April 4th 1609**. *The Character of the Beast*, is an apologetic for a change in Theology of **Smyth's** Churchmanship from Separatist to Baptist. He defended this shift on the grounds that, in his words, '**to change a false religion is commendable, and to retain a false religion is damnable.**'

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2B. The first 'Believers' Baptisms'

1. The date of the baptisms in the context of SMYTH's publications

It was sometime prior to the publication of, *The Character of the Beast*, and *Parallels*, that **Smyth** and **Helwys** took the decisive step of 'Believer's Baptism,' or, 'Re-baptism' as their detractors and opponents interpreted it. The date can only be tentatively identified, but *The Character of the Beast* was written after the baptisms had taken place is made clear when **Smyth** refers to, '**the practice of that which is done by us.**' Now: *The Character of the Beast*, was published a few days after his *Parallels*, as we have already mentioned, so *Parallels* provides the latest possible date for the baptisms, therefore no later than **March 1609**. But what of the earliest possible date? **Smyth's** *The Differences of the Churches of the Separation*, was published in **1608**. As the title indicates, it is a Separatist work which sets out the reasons why Smith's congregation disagreed with the ancient Church in Amsterdam, and it does not mention baptism. So the act of 'Believer's Baptism' took place somewhere after the writing of *The Differences of the Churches of the Separation*, and before *Parallels*. That at least parts of *Parallels* was written after the baptisms is shown when **Smyth** stated, '**True calling profession and baptism and inward calling of profession and baptism are the true tokens of sanctification and saints. The inward must be discerned by the outward, the truth must be judged by the word. He that is so called so professeth is so baptized as the word teacheth. He that is baptized into that true faith after that true manner Christ hath prescribed I must needs say that he is truly called, truly professeth, is truly baptized, and so he by reason of his outward true calling, true profession of the true faith and true baptism is discerned and judged to be inwardly called, inwardly to have faith, to be inwardly baptized, and that truly. A company of men thus called, professing and baptized, are saints.**' He also added elsewhere that, 'people enter in the true visible Church by the door which is baptism.' It was then late 1608 to early 1609 that **Smyth** baptized himself, then **Helwys**, and then the rest of the congregation, constituting by that act the first Baptist Church, although I am inclined to agree with those who argue for early **1609** because as **Jason Leigh** puts it, '**Smyth's reply to Clifton's response in ten days implies that the baptism was a hot issue.**'

2. JOHN ROBINSON: A close (secondhand) account of first Baptists baptisms.

There were no extant first hand accounts of the baptisms, What we do have are later accounts chiefly written by opponents of the nascent Baptist Church, and also a few echoes and probable allusions in **Smyth's** own writings to the act and the mode adopted. One such account comes from **John Robinson** who shared with **Smyth** in the Pastoral oversight of the Gainsborough Scruby Separatists, then emigrated to Amsterdam in **1608**, eventually settling in Leiden in the Spring of **1609** from where members of his congregation left and sailed for the new world on 'The Mayflower,' as the 'Pilgrim Fathers.' **Robinson** claimed that his account was from those involved: 'As I heard from themselves on this matter, **Mr. Smyth, Mr. Helwys**, and the rest, having utterly dissolved and disclaimed their former Church state and ministry, came together to erect a new church by baptism unto which they also ascribed so great virtue as they would not so much as pray together before they had it. After some straining of courtesy, who should begin, – that of **John the Baptist** (*Matthew 3:14*) mis-alleged -, **Mr. Smyth** baptized first himself, then **Mr. Helwys**, and then the rest making their particular confessions. 'I demand into what Church he entered by baptism, or entering by baptism into no church how his baptism could be true by their own doctrine. Or: **Mister Smyth's** baptism not being true nor he by it

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entering into any Church, how **Mister Helwys's** baptism could be true and into what Church he entered by it? These things thus being all wise men will think that he had no small cause either to be so enamored of his own baptism or so highly to despise other men's for the un-orderly or otherwise unlawful ministration of it.'

3. Two objections from **RICHARD CLIFTON**, an Anglican Baptist sympathizer.

Richard Clifton confirmed this when he referred to, 'that detestable heresy of anabaptism.' Later he wrote, 'Now you say a Church cannot be erected without baptism, because baptism is the visible form thereof. Consider you that are so barren of proof of the administering of baptizing to yourself that you can show one good reason to warrant it to be lawful.'

3B. Se Baptism.

1. **RICHARD BERNARD: Objections to SMYTH's 'Se-Baptism'.**

For his act of self baptism, and writing in **1610** (so a year after the baptisms took place) **Richard Bernard** who was Smyth's main protagonist in the earlier of the two **1609** works *Parallels* gave him the nickname 'The se-baptist,' i.e.: 'the self Baptist.' 'I will be somewhat exorbitant with myself to call Mister John Smyth the Anabaptist or se-baptist. Notorious acts, we may read, have made men remarkable and have gotten them names and titles for a memorial of the facts and deeds done, why then should he not obtain worthily what he has deserved? He is anabaptiscal for re-baptisation, and he is the se-baptist because he did baptize himself. It is more than Christ would do, but he could find no whither to go for baptism.' **Bernard** continued his attack: 'Now Mister Smyth did baptize himself and was not before by his own judgment and profession baptized. So a person un-baptised did baptize, and therefore it is no true sacrament by his own doctrine, as also unwarrantable from the Scripture. And therefore all his company have received by him corruption: they have made a false entrance into their new way by Mister Smyth's own testimony. He would not go to others to be baptised, for then he should have been of their fraternity, and so have lost his own company. But he would have none of that. **Bernard** denied that **Smyth** had recovered the true baptism, and the true matter and form of a true Church which is now only to be found pure among a company of se-baptists. Mr Smyth will hold ever this word 'se' to himself. For in going into Brownism (that is 'separatism') he was a separatist, he held different opinions from them; and now that he is in anabaptism he is a 'se-baptist'.

2. **SMYTH's defence of his Se-Baptism in *The Character of the Beast***

But **Smyth** had already defended his actions in the work that he wrote after the baptisms, *The Character of the Beast*. In his own words: 'Now for baptising a man's self there is as good warrant as for a man 'churching' himself which is what the separatists had done when they left the Church of England. For two men singly are no church: jointly they are a church, and they both of them put a church upon themselves. So may two men put baptism upon themselves, for both those persons un-churched yet have power to assume the church, each of them for himself with others in communion. So each of them un-baptised has power to assume baptism for himself with others in communion.' In stark contrast to **Robinson's** dismissal of his 'se-baptism' and churchmanship by an appeal to **John the Baptist**, **Smyth** had already defended it on the basis of the example of the Baptist as providing Biblical precedent for his actions, 'in the same way that **Abraham** first circumcised himself and then his family. And then as **Abraham**,

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and **John the Baptist**, and all the proselytes after **Abraham's** example (*Exodus* 12:48) did administer the sacrament upon themselves, so may any man raised up after the apostasy of antichrist in the recovering of the Church by baptism, administer it upon himself in communion with others.'

4B. SMYTH's Ecclesiology

1. SMYTH 'answers' ROBINSON's ecclesial objections

To **Robinson's** rejection of the Baptists being a Church **Smyth** again had already supplied his answer with the many references to *Matthew* 18 verse twenty as a key to his understanding of the Church. For instance: 'If two or three faithful people should rise up and join together to walk in the faith, the Lord maketh His covenant with them. He is their God. They are His People. They are His Temple. He walketh there. He is their Father. They are His sons and daughters. Christ is their King. They are His Kingdom, even a kingdom of priests etc.. And therefore wheresoever in the Scripture a covenant is made with any, it is to be understood as made with Abraham's children according to their faith and therefore with two or three faithful people anywhere in the world.'

2. SMYTH's 'ecclesiology' as a basis for 're-instituting' 'Believers Baptism'

It was this understanding of the Church that legitimised **Smyth** and **Helwys's** action in re-instituting believer's baptism. **Smyth** concluded that, 'to his disciples, to two or three gathered together into His Name doth He give power to preach and baptise,' and added his conviction, 'that God hath given them, that is the faithful, power to reform themselves.' For **Smyth** and the first Baptists it was quite simply necessary that he baptised himself. 'A man cannot baptise others into the church, himself being out of the church. Therefore it is lawful for a man to baptise himself together with others in communion, and this warrant is a plerophory for the practice of that which is done by us.'

3. A first Baptist objection: AINSWORTH opposes SMYTH's Se Baptism

Another former member of the **Scrubby Separatists**, **Henry Ainsworth**, confirmed the Se-Baptism but when on to show that the mode of baptism was not immersion as we might expect, but affusion i.e.: pouring. 'Mister Smith baptised himself with water, but a child could have done the like unto himself so cannot perform any part of Spiritual Worship. Therefore Mister Smith anabaptising himself with water did no part of Spiritual Worship,' and **Ainsworth** then adds, 'if he, **Smyth**, answer that a child though he could cast water on himself and utter such words as he heard Mister Smyth speak with all.'

4. A contemporary Anglican objection from Bishop Joseph Hall (Lincoln)

The mode of affusion is also later confirmed by the **Bishop of Lincoln Joseph Hall** who in his later writings against the Separatists in the persons of **Smyth** and **Robinson** in particular asked, 'Show you me where the apostles baptised in a basin!' In adopting affusion **Smyth** and **Helwys** employed the mode not only familiar to the Puritan Separatists but also to the Waterlander Mennonites around whom they were, or who were around them. It is clear that **Smyth** knew at least some Greek, but whatever his level of competency he did not progress

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from the meaning of the Greek word ‘to baptise’ βαπτίζω to the mode of immersion. Indeed, immersion was not adopted by Baptists until the late **1630s** and early **1640s**.

5B. The roots of SMYTH’s Theology

1. SMYTH: Believer’s baptism the continuation of Puritan and Separatist beliefs

Since the Mid-Twentieth Century scholars have debated the origins of **Smyth**’s change of churchmanship in general, and his views of baptism in particular; whether it was a logical development from his Separatism, or influenced by Anabaptist thought, The debate continues, but it cannot be overlooked that **Smyth** considered it to be the true development of his earlier Puritan and Separatists beliefs. He writes, ‘That we should fall from the profession of Puritanism to Brownism, that is Separatism, and from Brownism to true Christian Baptism is not simply evil or re-provable in itself, except it be true that we have fallen from true religion. If we therefore being formerly deceived in the way of Paedobaptistry (that is infant baptism) now do embrace the truth in the form of the true Christian Apostolic Baptism, then let no man impute this as a fault unto us.’

2. I.H. rebukes SMYTH over not receiving a Mennonite Baptism

If this claim of continuity with his Puritanism and Separatism on this point are to be taken seriously and at face value, then **Smyth** and his followers baptised themselves only because they did not know of any other Churches that could baptise them. If the Mennonites had convinced them of the correctness of ‘Believer’s Baptism’ **Smyth** and his followers would have asked the Mennonites to re-baptize them. He and they did not. This is confirmed by a **1610** work by I.H. There is a debate as to whether this is **Joseph Hall** or **John Hetherington**. But whoever the I.H. it was summed up by ‘you would not receive your baptism first from the elders of the Dutch Anabaptists, but you would be holier than all, and see how you have marred all!’

3. Anabaptists not an influence on SMYTH

This for me is the decisive argument against direct Anabaptist influence on Baptist origins. **Smyth** and his followers baptized themselves, though this does not rule out any contact with them either before or after the adoption of ‘Believer’s Baptism.’ In his part posthumously published works **Smyth** recalled that, ‘seeing there was no Church to whom we could join with a good conscience to have baptism from them, therefore we might baptize ourselves. That this is so the Lord knoweth, my conscience witnesseth, and **Mister Helwys** himself will not deny it.’ This position receives further support when it is noted that in ‘Parallels,’ published after the baptisms had taken place, **Smyth** distances himself from the Anabaptists including them with Arians, Lutheran Ubitiquists, and the Papists as those false christs and false prophets, that is to say false churches and false ministers which profess and teach doctrines of the **Lord Jesus** falsely.

4. Baptist ‘reintroduction of baptism’ ‘was not re-baptising’ or Anabaptism

Part of the reason for **Smyth** distancing himself from the Anabaptists was that he didn’t regard his and **Helwys**’s re-introduction of baptism as re-baptism. Neither did he at this time regard the Mennonites as a true Church, and also because of the implication of being charged with

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Anabaptism. In Seventeenth Century English Society as with all European Societies at the time, Church and State were seen as one – the idea of Christendom, and all people entered both through Infant Baptism. To deny this was to undermine the very fabric of society. (For further details c.f.: ICPICCJC B.A./B.D./B.TH./B.MIN course, *Themes and Personalities in the Reformation*, Unit 1). The charge of Anabaptism in both England and continental Europe incurred the severest treatment, and sometimes execution. In fact, the last persons burned for heresy in England were the Anabaptist Anti-Trinitarians **Bartholomew Leggett** and **Edward Whiteman in 1612**. In adopting ‘Believer’s Baptism’ the first Baptists were charged with being Anabaptists and therefore with the ancient crime of re-baptism. Following the horror of the Radical Anabaptist debacle at Munster in **1534-1535**, being labeled an Anabaptist became a sure route to persecution, and even death. (For more details c.f.: ICPICCJC B.A./B.D./B.TH./B.Min course *Themes and Personalities in the Reformation*, Unit 4). This charge of being Anabaptists the Baptists repudiated, although it is clear that they were prepared to face persecution for Christ’s sake and the Gospel.

C. THE CHARACTER OF THE BEAST

1B. SMYTH’s objections to ‘Infant baptism’: The Character of the Beast I

1. SMYTH: Infant Baptism false and an heresy

As we have seen, *The Character of the Beast* structurally is divided into two parts, and this is set out in the second paragraph of the book. ‘This therefore is the question whether the baptism of infants be lawful yea or nay, and whether persons baptized being infants must not renounce that false baptism, and assume the true baptism of Christ which is to be administered upon persons confessing their faith and their sins.’ The illegitimacy of infant baptism was of no small matter to **Smyth** for he regarded the error of baptizing infants to have been a chief point of ‘Anti-Christianism,’ and the very essence and constitution of the false Church. He made the same point more starkly when he remarked that, ‘It seemeth unto us the most unreasonable heresy of all Anti-Christianism. For considering what baptism is, an infant is no more capable of baptism than is any unreasonable or insensible creature.’ Towards the end of this book he summarized his argument against Infant Baptism in these words, ‘We have already proved that the baptism is essentially false and none of Christ, and therefore it is the character or mark of the beast openly retained in the forehead of all the subjects of antichrist who professing themselves to be of that baptism do profess themselves to be of that body, for of that body they are of whose baptism they are, and of that baptism they are of whose body they are. And we have also proved that the Lord’s true baptism does not appertain to the carnal life, but only to them that are of Abraham’s faith, that is, actually believing to Justification, and showing the Faith of Abraham by the words of Abraham.’

2. A first error: Inner and outer rite separated in Infant baptism

For **Smyth** the ‘error’ of Infant Baptism lay first in its separation of the outer rite from the inner transformed life of the believer. In his words, ‘For Baptism is not washing with water, but it is the Baptism of the Spirit, the confession of the mouth, and the washing with water.’ For him it was a great folly to wash with water which is the least and last of baptism, someone not baptised with the Spirit and cannot confess with the mouth. To have the outer within the inner invoked his rhetorical: ‘How is it baptism if one be so washed?’ This however was not to lessen

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the importance of water baptism. Rather, for **Smyth** it was to set water baptism in its rightful place. He stated, ‘I deny that the Baptism of Water is the seal of the New Testament.’ But he did not deny this of the Baptism of the Spirit. In an important passage he asserted, ‘I say therefore that the seal of the Spirit must go before the baptism of water, and as all the ordinances of the New Testament are Spiritual and yet visible, so is the seal of the New Testament Spiritual and yet visible. And thereupon men being visibly sealed with the seal of the Spirit as Cornelius’s company was (*Acts 10:47*), may challenge the baptism with water as Peter their teacher. This visible seal of the New Testament is confession, as in the Old Testament circumcision was their confession. And baptism is not a seal, but a manifestation of a seal.’ To this he added, ‘Water is not the matter of baptism but only the instrument of baptism. In the same way that fire is the instrument of burning, so water is of washing. And as the matter of burning is the fuel, so the matter of the washing is the party washed, that is the persons upon whom baptism is conferred.’ **Smyth** was careful therefore to distinguish the outer and the inner whilst keeping them together and maintaining the primacy of the inner Spirit baptism. He said, ‘As the true sacraments are not only the outward elements, but the inward grace also, and that most especially.’ This is why he and the others adopted ‘Believer’s Baptism.’

3. A second error: In the New Testament confession of faith precedes baptism

The second ‘error’ of Infant Baptism which is implicit in the first is that to baptism in the New Testament there is required actual faith and repentance confessed by the mouth. By extension this means that children of Christian parents are not actual members of the Visible Church, and therefore should not be baptized as the Paedo-Baptists did. With Habakkuk 2:04 in mind, **Smyth** stressed the need for personal faith. (N.B.: For more details on Habakkuk 2:04 c.f.: PICC B.A./B.D./B.Min. course, ‘Habakkuk and the Habakkuk Pesher,’ Unit 4). ‘For the prophet teacheth that every man shall live by his own faith, and that one man’s faith cannot convey the covenant of Justification to another, neither can one man’s sin cut off another from the covenant as this doctrine importeth. But the soul that sinneth, it shall die.’ This undergirded his observation that, ‘None in the New Testament shall be baptized but those that are actually possessed of the covenant of the New Testament. But the actual possession of the promise is by obedience to the faith. For by faith we receive the Promise of the Spirit by the hearing of faith preached. And faith cometh by hearing the Word preached.’

2C. SMYTH repudiates Separatist Ecclesiology

1. The Separatist as corrupt as the Roman or member of the C of E

By this time **Smyth** had come to see the Separatists as corrupt as the Church of England and the Church of Rome. Of the Separatists he says, ‘As very an harlot as either her mother England or her grandmother Rome is out of whose loins she came. And although once in our ignorance we had acknowledged here the true Church, yet now being better informed we revoked that our erroneous judgment in protest against her as well for her false constitution as for her false ministry worship and government.’ He then set out his newly discovered understanding of the Church,. ‘The true constitution of the Church is of a new creature baptized into the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The false constitution is of infants baptized. We profess therefore that all those Churches that baptize infants of the same false constitution. And all those Churches that baptize the new creature, those that are made disciples by teaching, men confessing their faith and their sins are of one true constitution.’

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2. SMYTH and the Bishop of Norwich challenge separatists to leave the C of E.

Smyth then issued a challenge to the Separatists to leave the Church of England as they had left the Church of Rome: ‘Therefore the Separation must either go back to England, or go forward to true baptism. And all that shall in time to come separate from England must separate from the baptism of England. And if they will not separate from the baptism of England, there is no reason why they should separate from England as from a false Church. **Joseph Hall**, later **Bishop of Norwich** agreed with **Smyth**’s argument: ‘Either you must go forward to Anabaptism,’ he said, ‘or come back to us,’ (addressing the Separatists) ‘or your Rabbins cannot answer that charge of your baptized brother **Smyth** against **Clifton**; ‘If we be a true Church you must return. If we be not, as a false church is no Church of God, you must re-baptise. If our baptism be good, then is our constitution good.’

3C. An apology for ‘believer’s baptism’: The character of the Beast II

1. Paedeo-Baptism is ‘inconsistent with the New Testament witness’

The second part of ‘The Character of the Beast’ is an apology for the baptism of converts into the true Church. This position follows from the place Scripture holds in **Smyth**’s Theology and practice. ‘The declaration of faith and repentance are the antecedents of baptism and water,’ he said. He denied that infants are legitimate recipients of baptism because they cannot declare that they are baptized inwardly with the Spirit, and so cannot outwardly by the baptism with water declare the same but are in every respect unable thereto, and un-capable thereof.’ For **Smyth** in fact the baptism of Infants was inconsistent with New Testament thought and practice, and despite the claims of ‘Paedo-Baptists’ it was absent from the New Testament and its thought altogether. **Smyth** highlighted ‘the deep silence of infants’ baptism:’ ‘Yea, the exclusive condition of believing and repenting is necessary to the Kingdom of God; yea and the confession of sins and confession of faith performed by persons baptized; yea and Christ’s commandment of making disciples before baptism; all these and many more are strong proofs and unanswerable against baptism of infants.’

2. John the Baptist’s baptism and Pentecost baptisms paradigms for Christianity

For **Smyth** the *New Testament* pattern was clear. He traced this back to the baptizing ministries of **John the Baptist**, **Christ**, and the Apostles. He stated plainly that **John** baptized no children, and that his preaching pre-emptorily excluded infants because it was the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Those who came to John had to confess their sins and repent. Otherwise John would not baptize them. ‘As such,’ **Smyth** declared, ‘Christian doctrine is the same with **John**’s, both signifying that whosoever would be baptised and entering into the Kingdom of God must repent and believe the Gospel.’ Of the baptisms of Pentecost he observed, ‘Is not the Scripture plentiful in declaring unto us that the Lord addeth daily to the Church such as should be saved (*Acts 2:47*); that they that gladly received the word were baptized and added to the Church and continued therein (*Acts 2:41-2:42*). Doth not the apostle teach that there is One Church, One Faith, One Baptism, One Body, One Lord, and but One (*Ephesians 4*). And they that are not of this faith: Body, Baptism, Lord, are without this faith, without the Body (that is the Church), without the true Baptism, without this true Lord and King **Jesus Christ**; and so are none of God’s people visible, and none of Christ’s Kingdom, none of Christ’s Body, none of His Faith and baptism. Are not true Faith, Prayer, Baptism, the Lord’s Supper true Church plain and pregnant demonstrative adjuncts of God’s visible people?’

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3. SMYTH: Old and New Covenant: Believer's baptism succeeds circumcision

As a Separatist the covenant had played a key role in both **Smyth's** doctrine of the Church and Baptism. But as a Baptist the covenant figures less prominently in his Theology, largely I believe because of the appeal 'Paedo-Baptists' made to the continuity of the two covenants, Old and New Testaments, in their defense of infant baptism. But this is not to suggest that **Smyth** abandoned the language of covenant altogether. Rather, he stressed that there is discontinuity between the Old and New Covenants. In the New, he says, 'the true form of The Church is a covenant betwixt God and the faithful made in baptism in which Christ is visibly put on,' and that, 'infants cannot receive the covenant which is only done by actual visible faith.' **Smyth** drew a distinction between the commandments of the two Testaments as, 'betwixt the commandments legal and the commandments evangelical. The commandments legal require absolute obedience in the highest degree thereof. The Gospel requires true and unfeigned repentance in the best degree we can afford. The fact that the Gospel requireth repentance precluded infants as the recipients of baptism.' This distinction between the two covenants was key to **Smyth**. 'Paedo-Baptists' then as now appeal to the continuity between the covenants and the correspondence of the old rite of circumcision with the new covenant's rite of baptism.

4. SMYTH against CLIFTON: Hagar versus Sarah

This figures strongly in **Richard Clifton's** argument with **Smyth**. In response **Smyth** argued that in accordance with *Galatians* 4:24 two covenants were made with Abraham: one for Hagar (the *Old Testament*); and one for Sarah (the *New Testament*). 'From these,' he says, 'were two seeds: the carnal seed born after the flesh (Ishmael); and one type the Spiritual seed born by promise (*Galatians* 4:23) that is Isaac. As a result there were two seals: Circumcision – a seal of the Carnal Covenant upon the carnal children – and the Holy Spirit of Promise (a seal of the Spiritual Covenant) upon the Spiritual Seed.' He continued: 'Now you I am persuaded of mere ignorance mistaking the covenant do make circumcision a seal of the everlasting Spiritual Covenant, which is an error. And thereupon you build all your false building of 'Paedo-baptistry' which is as an house built upon the sand by the foolish builders.' **Smyth** categorically denied the equivalence of the two rites: 'You say that baptism cometh in the room of circumcision as a seal of the same promises to us and our seed. I utterly deny it. And I prove the contrary unto you. Seeing that the circumcision of the heart succeedeth in the place of circumcising the flesh (*Romans* 2:29).' Further he asked how it could be possible if circumcision and baptism were equivalents that when Jews were converted in the *New Testament*, they who had already been circumcised were then baptized? He argued: 'If therefore Christ, John, and the Apostles would needs baptize them and so by baptism constitute them into the *New Testament* that had all these prerogatives in your judgment, much more will they have us constitute anti-Christians converted into the true Church by baptism.' **Smyth's** hope was that he would convince **Clifton** and other Separatists on the matter of baptism. He wrote, 'There is one and indeed but one argument which the Separationists principally stand upon, and that is the covenant which say they, 'If it be answered they must needs yield to the truth.'

5. SMYTH's passion at the end of 'Character of the Beast'

The intensity of **Smyth's** convictions come out towards the end of his concluding paragraph of *The Character of the Beast*: 'Thus through God's providence and blessing I am come to a happy end of answering your writing wherein I praise the Lord for his mercy I have received

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such assurance of the truth as that you and all the earth shall never be able to wring it out of my heart and hands. And therefore I desire you Sir, and all the leaders of the Separation to weigh seriously even betwixt the Lord and their own hearts upon their beds this which is written. I doubt not but that I may have erred in particulars, and I have resolved to be vile before men in confessing my errors. But for the main points in controversy and the cause I defended is the most undoubted and most evident truth that ever was revealed to me. And therefore as you love the Lord and His truth and the people that depend upon you; seek it out and embrace it, and resist it not. But if we be in error, show it unto us why. Why shall we perish through your default? Will not the Lord require our blood at your hand? Are we not your countrymen, all of us? In exile for the common truths we hold out against antichrist! Answer we beseech you in the Lord. May we adjure you in the Lord – if we be in error it is ignorantly, and of a desire to see the truth and to fear the Lord.’

D. OTHER CONTEXTUAL AND HISTORICAL MATTERS

1D. Links with other groups

1. Baptist and Separatist splits

The English Separatists in exile in The Netherlands were prone to splits. It is clear that this pattern continued. We know of the disagreements that arose between **Smyth**’s congregation and ‘the Ancient Church’ which had led to the publication of **Smyth**’s ‘The Defense of the Churches of the Separation,’ in **1608**. In the Spring of **1609** **Robinson** had led a group of around a hundred to Leiden leaving just around fifty who adopted ‘Believer’s Baptism’ that same year. A year after this, **Clifton** shows us that shortly after his ‘Se-Baptism’ **Smyth** had begun to question the validity of his actions, and that the original Baptist congregation had split into three groups: one which adopted an unorthodox Christology; **Smyth**’s majority group; and around ten under **Helwys**’s leadership.

2. Successionism, SMYTH and the Waterlanders

Also around this time it is clear that **Smyth** had approached the local Mennonites and had already begun negotiations with them on whether his congregation should join them. It is clear that soon after the adoption of ‘Believer’s Baptism’ a doubt arose in **Smyth**’s mind over the matter of ‘Successionism’. Whilst **Smyth** had previously rejected Successionism regarding it as a ‘typical ordinance of the Old Testament, and therefore abolished by Christ’s coming,’ now he had clearly changed his mind. When precisely **Smyth** first approached the Mennonites is unknown, but the Baptist congregation’s renting of the Mennonite Jan Munter’s bakehouse probably took place after the split with **Robinson**’s congregation, and after their adoption of ‘Believer’s Baptism’. While it has often been assumed that the split between **Smyth** and **Helwys** and their followers only occurred after the application to join the Waterlanders, it is evident that it happened before. In a letter to the Waterlanders, **Helwys** reported that, ‘it is heard on the streets that certain who were of us but at this point in time are justly excluded from the communion of saints are now attempting to join themselves to you,’ i.e.: it is **Smyth**’s congregation in question here.

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3. Helwys objects but the Smythites are accepted as Mennonites

In early 1610 the **Smyth** group sought membership with the Waterlander Mennonites and to this end presented first a short confession in twenty articles, then one in thirty eight signed by the forty two members of the group. This prompted two letters from **Helwys's** group asking the Waterlanders not to accept the application 'from those cast out from us.' The longer letter defended their original 'Believer's Baptisms' on the Biblical example of John the Baptist who being un-baptised preached the baptism of repentance, and they that believed and confessed their sins he baptized. They identified the whole cause in question being Succession which they described as 'antichrist's chief hold,' and that it is 'Jewish, ceremonial, and an Ordinance of the *Old Testament* but not of ye New.' In spite of the **Helwys's** group's appeal that the Waterlander Mennonites reject **Smyth's** application, the negotiations continued and **Smyth** penned several more works clarifying his views, including an argument against 'Infant Baptism'. These works however are not of concern to this paper for they clearly belong to **Smyth** when he had moved to a Mennonite position as had his followers, although their final acceptance into fellowship with the Mennonites didn't occur until 1615 three years after **Smyth's** death from consumption.

2D. HELWYS later writings

1. 'Declaration of Faith' 1611: Helwys catalogues and analyses Smyth's errors

In 1611 **Helwys** and his group published their 'Declaration of Faith' including a two page preface. In this **Helwys** listed **Smyth's** errors and claimed that he now taught that the Church and Ministry must come by Succession contrary to his former profession in words and writings; and that by a supposed succession he cannot show from whom nor when nor where. He also examined the subject of Successionism at length in his 1611 book, *Advertisement or Admonition?* **Helwys** lamented **Smyth's** abandonment of the Church he had founded and clearly mourned the end of his own fellowship with **Smyth**. **Helwys** called the Mennonite's insistence upon Succession 'this your great sin' and blamed the split between the two groups on them. He says, 'you came publicly amongst us and advanced your error of Succession and Order the result of which was that you have destroyed the faith of many thereby who for sinister respect were willing to follow you.'

2. SMYTH replies: *Retraction* (a posthumous publication)

In his final work, posthumously published, *Retraction*, **Smyth** summarized and answered **Helwys's** charge against him maintaining that the infidelity of the Roman Catholic Church had broken the Succession: 'But that when there is a true Church and ministers whence baptism may orderly be had, this should be done.' In short he had changed his views that the Mennonites were not a true Church to that they were a true Church and that they should have gone to them for baptism. **Helwys** disagreed. This is where **Smyth** left matters. By the time that his last book was written though not published (which was later) the **Helwys** group had already returned to England.

3. HELWYS: *A short declaration of the mystery of iniquity*, (1612)

Helwys is most famous for his work, 'A short declaration of the mystery of iniquity,' published in 1612, and its call for 'universal religious freedom.' This is something that **Dr Brian Haynes** will be looking at in Unit 5 of this course. He writes, 'For men's religion to God is betwixt God

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and themselves. The king may not answer for it neither may the king be judged between God and Man. Let them be hereticks, Turks, Jews, or whatsoever, it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure.’ It is this for which **Helwys**’s ‘Mystery of Iniquity’ is best known. What is less known is the way that **Helwys** ends this work. Here are his last lines: ‘Now as we through the Grace of God and by the warrant of His Word, so we wish all to do that fear God and seek the Glory of His Name, and come and lay down their lives in their own country for Christ and His truth thus commending all our poor endeavours to the best acceptance of every well disposed reader, beseeching the Lord to make His Grace to abound to ye all for the Glory of His Name and the Salvation of every one of your souls. Amen.’

4. Helwys and his Baptists return to Spitalfields in London

Helwys and the small company of Baptists returned to England settling at Spitalfields just outside the walls of the old City of London, probably in the latter part of **1612**. This is where the famous ‘Gerkin’ shaped building now stands. It was from here that he published ‘The Mystery of Iniquity’ and it is almost certain that for this brave plea for religious freedom not just for themselves but for everyone that he was imprisoned in the infamous Newgate prison.

5. John Merton becomes Baptist pastor in succession to Helwys: Baptists spread

By **1616** **Helwys** was dead, and **John Merton** took on the Pastoral oversight of the Church. **Helwys**’s tiny congregation survived, and by **1626** there were at least five Baptist congregations in London, Coventry, Lincoln, Salisbury, and Tiverton comprising some one hundred and fifty members. Nowadays, of course, there is a Baptist worldwide communion of somewhere between one hundred to one hundred and twenty million in number. It is nice that from the end of the passage that I have just read **Helwys** actually quotes from *Zechariah* 4 verse 10, ‘**Do not despise the day of small things.**’ It is a good sermon illustration. I have used it several times.

6. A closing observation

The question of Baptism remained a lively and deeply controversial issue throughout the Seventeenth Century, as it still does. Baptists actively engage with all comers on the subject. But **Smyth** and **Helwys** had laid the foundations on which **Merton** and others were to build.

E. CONCLUSION

So: In Conclusion: There is no escaping the fact that of the question of baptism, not just the subject, and after several decades the mode of Baptism, but also the Theology of Baptism was of far greater importance to Seventeenth Century Baptists than it is for their Twenty First Century descendants. It is inadequate to brush this off with the trite comment that all that needs to be said on Baptism has been said, for this is completely to ignore the fundamental differences of belief between on Baptism between the first Baptists and the Baptists of today. In comparison our Theology is frequently minimalistic. In fact it would be true to say that while Baptists know what they believe Baptism isn’t, they have little idea what it is. This equally applies to the satisfied belief, implicit or explicit, that there is nothing lacking in their Baptismal Theology or practice. This is one of the great lessons that we have learnt by Ecumenical involvement with other Christians. We have listened, we have learned. We have

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developed, and it is something that must continue. But when we hold Baptist teachings on baptism next to the rich teachings of the New Testament, we find contemporary Baptist views to be but a poor reflection. For here in Scripture it is part of the Divine Human encounter, the meeting place between the gracious God and the penitent sinner who comes in faith. It is part of the Gospel that's proclaimed, an integral part of becoming a Christian, the occasion when the Spirit is received, and the door of the Church, the means of union with Christ, in His death, burial and resurrection, and that all the benefits that are given to faith are given in Baptism, and so much more. If this is so, as a people of the Book, you Baptists should by that very tract be duty bound to study the Scriptures, and as **Smyth** was prepared to do, reform your Baptismal Theology and practice. Too often you have looked at those with whom you disagree, and have tried to point out our 'errors'. As **Smyth** said, 'We labour to discover their faults unto them, admonishing them to reform.' But you finish there, whilst **Smyth** continued, 'which we are bound to do.'

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UNIT 2: WILLIAM KIFFIN & PARTICULAR BAPTIST ORIGINS

Dr Larry Kreitzer

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UNIT 3: THE DANGERS OF JUST READING THE BIBLE: ORTHODOXY & CHRISTOLOGY

A. INTRODUCTION

1A. Notices, and introduction to Dr Stephen Holmes, Unit 2 Tutor

1. Introductory Greeting

Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen! Welcome on this rather Novemberly November evening to Regents' Park College, University of Oxford and to the next unit in our series 'Baptist Origins and History'. Our course is about the History and Origins of the Baptist Church, and is jointly sponsored by the Centre for Christianity and Culture and the Centre for Baptist History and Heritage. Before I introduce our lecturer for this unit, **Dr Stephen Holmes**, I am going to ask **Dr Louise Nelstrop** to contribute a few words about the Centre materials.

2. A United Kingdom bookstall notice

If you are interested in becoming a friend of the centre, please take a flyer. There is also a bookstall featuring books from all the author's of our units. There is also an offer – 30% of all our books that are from Paternoster Press, with a special offer on the 'Regents' Study Guides.' So please do take advantage of it.

3. Introduction to Dr Stephen Holmes

I would like to welcome tonight **Dr Stephen Holmes** who will be known to many of you I suspect: He is Senior Lecturer in Systematic Theology at the University of Saint Andrews in Scotland, United Kingdom; He's previously been on the staff of the Theology Department in Kings' College, University of London, England and Spurgeon's Baptist College, Forest Hill, London. He has studied at the University of Cambridge; Spurgeon's Baptist College, London; and Kings' College, University of London; and has written widely on matters of Systematic Theology, and Baptist identity and history. We are glad to welcome him not only because of his distinction as a scholar, but also because he brings a nice Theological edge to this historical series of units. We are and will be trying all the way through these units to investigate not just the history but also to see what Theological lessons we might be able to draw from that. We are hopeful that in investigating the 'Dangers of reading the Bible vis-à-vis questions of Christology and Christian Orthodoxy,' we may have some of those issues raised for us. So: Thank you for coming on a long journey to present this to us. We know that you are heading back tonight once you have lectured. We are very grateful for this presentation to us, and look forward to what you have to say. Thank you.

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2A. Orientation to Unit 2

1. Unit 2 in the context of Dr Holmes' work

Thank you to you all for the invitation to be with you today. It is a great pleasure and a great honor to be a part of your teaching course. The title I was given was, 'The Dangers of just reading the Bible,' which was rather different from the one just announced. So I will speak to the one that I was given if you don't mind. I will indeed be reflecting on this title rather Theologically by the end. Some of you may know that I wrote a small book on tradition a few years back which began and ended with Chapters entitled, 'Why can't we just read the Bible?' I stand by the arguments I made in those chapters that proper account of our creativeness and of the nature of saving Gospel truth means that God has intended most of us in the Church to experience the Gospel as something that is necessary 'traditioned' and handed on so that tradition properly understood is something to be celebrated and not to be bemoaned.

2. Sola Scriptura and Creed must belong together

I further argued there that even within a robust confession of 'Sola Scriptura' there are good reasons for ascribing a certain sort of authority to widely accepted Dogmatic Symbols, pre-eminently, of course, the Ecumenical Creeds. I have no wish to tamper with or rescind any of that, but neither do I have any wish to repeat it. What I am offering you here in this unit is a deliberately different approach on the same subject not because my earlier comments were inadequate, I hope, but merely because they were not exhaustive.

B. THREE SCENARIOS FROM BAPTIST HISTORY: THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

1B. The Salters' Hall Synod

1. General and Particular Baptist: Sola Scriptura and a Confession of Faith

The so called 'Salter's Hall Synod' of 1719 (held in Hackney, North London, England) has entered wider Baptist and indeed Non-Conformist historiography as an iconic defining moment, one which the title given to me was surely intended to recall. Faced with the invitation to subscribe to a Confession of Faith in the face of a strong contemporary pressure towards Arianism more immediately from the Exeter ministers (but in the previous decade both **Whiston's** 'Primitive Christianity' and **Clark's** 'Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity' had been published,) the Presbyterians and the General Baptists largely declined insisting that Scripture alone is a sufficient rule of faith, whereas the Congregationalists and the 'Particular Baptist' movement (including Regents' Park College) subscribed.

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2. Particular (subscribers) sustained and continued in the Trinitarian Faith

I quote: 'It is worthy of observation as it respects the non-subscribers amongst the Baptists that the Churches to which they belonged have become extinct. Or if there are any vestiges of them remaining, those who composed them are found marshalled under the banner of **Socinus**. The truth of the Gospel has not continued with them. These remarks are applicable to all the Presbyterian Churches. It is pleasant also to remark that most of the Particular Baptist Ministers in London were so zealous for the Doctrine of the Trinity and the Divinity of the Lord Jesus as to subscribe with their hands what they believed in their hearts thus contributing to stem the torrents that threatened to deluge the whole of the Churches.'

3. 'Just reading the Bible' usually leads to heresy

Now, we have to here acknowledge that our careful historian has allowed here just a degree of hyperbole to intrude into these remarks. It is not the case that London knew of no orthodox Presbyterians in the late Eighteenth Century, for instance. But the tale of non-subscription leading to Unitarianism is endlessly rehearsed, not least in Undergraduate 'Baptist principles' lectures. Hence it invites at least some academic reflection. Were it the case that all those who refused to subscribe were already cosset Arians, we would have little problem. Their influence on their Churches would be sufficient evidence for the falling away that followed. But the evidence for such an easy solution is not strong. The common statements containing non-subscription are careful to protest the orthodoxy of the non-subscribers, taking instead a stand on the position that no-one ought to be compelled to adopt or confess any human form of words. They wanted in the words of my title, 'to just read the Bible.' The familiar tale told of Salter's Hall and witnessed to by **Eiberney**, however, is that in just reading the Bible Orthodox believers seemingly almost inevitably fall into heresy.

2B. C.H. SPURGEON and his concerns

1. The C19 Baptist Union's orthodox missionary fervor - without a confession

Now, for this reason we must acknowledge another story that needs to be told, illustrated by an iconic moment in Baptist history when **C.H.Spurgeon**, concerned by the creeping centralization of the Baptist Union as much by the doctrinal laxity he perceived in some of its members, demanded that the Union required subscription to a statement of faith not dis-similar to that today of the Evangelical Alliance. A statement was tabled of course in 1888. But **Spurgeon** found it inadequate and withdrew from the Union. The result this time was opposite to that of the Salters' Hall affair. To quote another celebrated Baptist Historian **A.C.Underwood**: 'After more than fifty years few if any Baptists are now other than thankful that the Union took the stand it did.' I only observed Salters' Hall from the perspective of just over a century which is the perspective we can now bring to the downgrade. We might note that the Churches that withdrew at that time either relatively quickly rejoined the Union or largely declined

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into a fairly irrelevant if orthodox sectarianism; whereas the Evangelical tradition of missionary fervor and social transformation was maintained happily by the Union despite its lack of a confessional basis.

2. SPURGEON: An enemy of Socinianism who feared Arian re-emergence

A doctoral student of mine, **Christen George** has shown fairly conclusively that **Spurgeon's** great doctrinal fear was the resurgence of Arianism. The word is found repeatedly on his lips and from his pen in sermons and other writings. Now this must be regarded, I think, as at least somewhat eccentric or at least as an uncomfortably lax use of language when Theologically considered. He is in contrast to the Seventeenth Century when England had no true Arians who believed the Son to be the highest of all created beings and not co-eternal with the Father. As far as I can determine the prevailing anti-Trinitarian elements of the Nineteenth Century would then have been called **Socinian**, believing that Jesus Christ in metaphysical terms to be no more than a mere human being. This is an important Theological distinction, but I suspect that either **Spurgeon** was not aware of it, or simply impatient with any such niceties. After all, denying the Deity of Christ was denying the Deity of Christ, regardless of what you said instead.

3B. MICHAEL TAYLOR's 1971 Baptist Union Assembly Address

1. 'How much of a man was Jesus Christ?'

We may add a third and more recent moment which perhaps, if our historians should have the benefit of a Century's reflection on it will come to be seen as also significant: **Michael Taylor's** address to the 1971 English Baptist Union Assembly on the theme 'How much of a man was Jesus Christ?' Enough ink and rather too much blood has been spilled all over the appropriateness of **Taylor's** views. Let me just note, however, that **Taylor** appealed directly to the Nicene Creed in his address. The Union's response turned repeatedly on the wording of the 'Declaration of Principle.' Again confessional statements were to the fore of the dispute even if there seemed at that time little appetite for the production of a new one.

2. Baptist Currents and contexts of the early 1970s

This last event is perhaps particularly interesting in terms of the title that I have been given. It was not news to any of the major players at that time: **George Beasley Murray; Cyril Black; Ernest Payne; and Taylor** himself that the denomination had by 1970 acquired a Theological breadth that was going to be difficult for it to sustain. The Theological effects of the social upheavals of the 1960s were still being worked through; but included a new openness to the questioning of authority on the one hand and the rise of the Baptist Charismatic Movement that could be anti-intellectual and sometimes almost fundamentalistic in Theology at times on the other. **Billy Graham** had re-invigorated Conservative Evangelicalism particularly in the 1950s, and again in

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his 1960s visits. Nevertheless an older, broader tradition of Baptist life still persisted, especially in the committees of Baptist Church House. At some point a public disagreement was inevitable. What is striking is that it took place not over the 1967 Abortion Act which at the time most Evangelical Baptists were largely in favour of, or over Humanism which had provided a minor flashpoint a year earlier when it was claimed perhaps erroneously that the World Council of Churches was giving funds to support armed groups opposed to apartheid in South Africa, but over Christology. In 1719, 1887, and again in 1971, the presenting issue for profound and lasting disagreement in Baptist life has been Christological.

3. Other less consistently arising debates beside the Christological

Other issues have perhaps generated more protracted debates for us: Hymn singing in the Seventeenth Century; Evangelical Outreach and Open Communion in the Eighteenth Century; (Liberal) Biblical Criticism in the Nineteenth Century; and Charismatic Renewal and Ecumenism in the Twentieth Century. But I cannot think of an issue that has so regularly been a matter of significant controversy over the four centuries of Baptist denominational life. Probably those who advised the content of this series couldn't either, and hence I was given the title that I have.

C. PART I: A BRIEF OUTLINE OF BAPTIST CHRISTOLOGICAL HISTORY

1C. Introduction

1. Well meant ignorance of the Chalcedonian Settlement

We can't tell this history as a series of assaults against a Baptist commitment to a traditional and orthodox Christology. This I think would be rather too simplistic. Our history shows regular ignorance and occasional rejection of Orthodox Christology if by that is meant the account of the hypostatic union in Jesus Christ worked out at The Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon (451 A.D.) and enlarged at the Sixth Oecumenical Council in 680 A.D.

2. Early Baptist Christology based on Munis Triplex

I think we can trace our own distinct Christological emphases not opposed to this tradition, but addressing different questions, questions that mostly arise from certain Reformation emphases and debates. In a paper in *Baptist Quarterly* 2010 on 'British Baptist Doctrines of Scripture' I drew attention to a regular decision to 'treat of Scripture under the head of the prophetic office of Christ,' which runs from the rival confessions of **Smyth** and **Helwys** through the major Seventeenth Century symbols at least amongst the Particular Baptists, to the various forms of the modern Baptist 'Declarations of Principle'. This demonstrates the importance of the 'Munis Triplex'

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for Baptist Christologies, an idea which was not originating at the Reformation became an organizing theme for Reformed Christology from the earliest confessional material.

2C. The case of the Particular Baptists

1. The danger of a functionalist Christology

Of course in modern terms this might be in danger of being perceived as a merely functional Christology: Confessing Christ as prophet, priest, and king is compatible with various accounts of his person including those of the Arians and Socinians, as well as that of Chalcedonian Orthodoxy.

2. Munis Triplex Christology has a Chalcedonian basis

There is no evidence that the Particular Baptists ever fell into this trap in any numbers however, but they were interested in Christ's present work in and His presence over His Churches. And so after a brief but serious confession of the Hypostatic Union, they tended to turn to a discussion of the 'Threefold Office' ('Munis Triplex'). This is most glaringly obvious in the 1644 'London Confession' which offers an account of Christology Proper in Article 9; then in Article 10 defines Christ's Mediatorial Role through the Munis Triplex; it explores this role in Articles 11 to 14 with general discussions of the threefold nature of the mediatorship; Articles 15 and 16 are given to Christ as prophet; Articles 17-18 are given to Priesthood; and Articles 19 and 20 to kingship. One article confessing an Orthodox Doctrine of Christ's Person, Article 11, discusses Christ's work under the headings 'prophet,' 'priest,' 'king.' Similar, although less extensively developed patterns can be seen in several of the other Seventeenth Century Confessions.

3C. The complex Christological history of the General Baptists

1. The human nature of Christ 'in no way received from the Virgin Mary'

When we turn to the General Baptists we find a more controversial history. Sixteenth Century Anabaptism had no Christological innovation in the Doctrine of the Heavenly Flesh of Christ. Now: We should note that there are two distinct versions of this Doctrine already amongst the Anabaptists. Both agree that the Human nature of Christ was in no way received from the Blessed Virgin Mary but came down from heaven merely passing through the Virgin's body. However, whereas **Kasper Schrenkfeldt** seemed to hold this was true human flesh merely created in heaven ex-nihilo rather than derived from Mary's own body, **Melchior Hoffmann** seemingly denied the Human Nature at all suggesting instead some form of the 'making visible of the Divine Christ' as the sum total of the Incarnation, clearly a form of Docetism. **Mennies Simons** has been accused of being as Docetic as **Hoffmann**, a charge that seems to me to be unfair.

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2. JOHN ELASCOE: Aristotlean Biology and the Incarnation

In his most sustained writing on the subject, the 1554 to **John Elascoe** entitled 'The Incarnation of our Lord,' his reasons for insisting on Mary's lack of contribution to the Human Nature of the Incarnate One, are presented as stemming from Aristotlean Biology which he believes however to be taught in Scripture. If one holds to this scheme, and it was more or less universal in Mediaeval Europe, then the mother's womb provides nothing more than the necessary conditions for the male sperm to grow into a child. And so, to this thinking, no mother contributes anything beyond nurture to her child. However, the Divine Word was truly incarnate,

4C. Mennonite Christology

1. Jesus Christ conceived by the pure seed of God His Father

Meno (Founder of the Mennonites) does not seem to doubt that: 'We believe and confess that the same word became flesh was fed and nourished in truly human fashion in her virgin body by ordinary food and drink just as Isaac was in Sarah, as a regular child of her flesh and blood to the certain testimony that He was truly Human and not a mere Phantasm. It seems, and although he unfairly accuses **Meno** of Docetism, **Williams** sees this point with some clarity. A significant part of the concern of these Anabaptists on this question was what has become in Modern Dogmatics the question of the fallen-ness or otherwise of the Human Nature assumed by the Logos. To quote **Meno** again: 'With unambiguous words and unmistakable clarity, **John** indicated of what seed and by whom Mary of whom Matthew and Luke had spoken had conceived: namely, not of the unclean seed of Adam, but of the pure seed of his Father, God's Word. This coincides neatly with a broadly exemplarist account of Christ's Saving Work which may be why the position was more attractive to Mennonites and General Baptists than to the more Calvinistic.

2. The later Meno's Christology

Now: Later in this book **Meno** will make some less happy statements because he does not seem to understand the Chalcedonian grammar of 'One Person in Two Natures.' But I am confident that this is a broadly accurate account of his belief, and that it appears at least genuinely incarnational however much we may feel the peculiar nature of it, is unhappy.

3. The Waterlanders: An 'Heavenly flesh Christology'

What of the 'Waterlanders' with whom **Smyth** and **Helwys** came into contact (c.f.: Unit 1)? It seems the Mennonites in general remained open on this question. Their significant Dordrecht Confession of 1632 is studiously uncommitted on the point, and very deliberately so it seems to me. The earlier 1580s confession, a version of which was proposed to **Smyth** and others for signature was unclear but probably invited an

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‘Heavenly Flesh’ type reading. That the issue was live then is suggested by **Helwys**’s ‘Counter Confession’ which studiously excludes any such Doctrine.

5C. MATTHEW KIFFIN: A Melchiorite Christological influence?

1. The topographical link with the Western European Lowlands

Now: It is commonly claimed that the General Baptists in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries found **Melchiorite** Christology attractive. Whilst the full commitment of some of the English Baptist Churches, particularly in Kent and Sussex, to a Christology of this sort dates only from the formation of the Kent Association of 1708, its popularity is held to be down to the influence of **Matthew Kiffin** which had clearly been felt much earlier. It seems plausible to assume also that the General Baptists, perhaps particularly those nearer Europe (this is complete supposition on my part but the fact that these ideas are current in Kent and Sussex and also in the Low Countries of Europe invites such a supposition) retains some influence from the Mennonites.

2. KIFFIN: not a docetist

Now: What of **Kiffin**? Was he docetic with **Melchior Hoffmann** or was he merely eccentric with **Kasper Schrenkfeldt**? Our historians almost universally suggest that Kiffinist progress was from Docetism to Arianism, from a denial of the True Humanity of Christ to a denial of His Deity. Noting the distinction above between a genuinely Melchiorite Christology and a merely eccentric **Schrenkfeldtian** or **Mennonite** doctrine, I think that we need to press this question a little harder. It seems to me it would be very surprising to discover that **Kiffin** at any point was genuinely docetic. His early published writings are polemics against the Quakers, and he is so insistent on the reality of the Humanity of Jesus Christ that a later descent into the denial of the point would seem profoundly unlikely. When charged directly with Christological error by **Monk** and **Haynes** during a pamphlet war that delightfully wanders from the ethical significance of holding a patent to Trinitarian Doctrine and back again, **Kiffin** denies docetism.

3. KIFFIN: Not a Eutychian

Monk’s charge of Eutychianism whilst expressing his faith in terms that admit and even invite a **Schrenkfeldtian** or **Mennonite** understanding: ‘If by his saying that I deny that Jesus Christ took the flesh of the Virgin Mary he means that the Redemption of Mankind is no more precious than the death and blood-shedding of a body of flesh in the fallen state under condemnation for original sin, then I do readily declare my dissent thereunto. But this I consent unto and verily believe that the True Messiah that the Father had sealed to be the Blessed Saviour of the world was conceived in the Virgin Mary and there took our nature and our form and so was in all points like unto His brethren, sin excepted.’

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4. Kiffin was not an Arianist, but had an Arianism of a kind

As far as I can tell there is no direct evidence in his own writings that **Kiffin** later descended into Arianism either. His 'Dictionary of National Biography' entry claims that he denies the charge in a work later in the same pamphlet war, a work entitled, 'A raging wave foaming out his own shame.' Having read this work twice now I can see absolutely no discussion of Christology at all, I am not quite sure to what the author was alluding unless there is another edition which has escaped my notice. However: **Whitney**'s edition of the 'Minutes of the General Assembly' is suggestive. In 1698 the Northamptonshire Churches queried whether it was acceptable to believe that, 'The Son of God or the Word was not of the Uncreated Nature and Substance of the Father, neither of the Nature and created substance of His mother.' So, Arianism: '... not of the Uncreated Substance of the Father;' and this weird Christology, 'neither of the created nature of His mother,' which views are in the minutes explicitly attributed to **Kiffin**, albeit by third parties.

5. KIFFIN: An Orthodox Christology testified before the 'General Assembly'

Kiffin was summoned to appear before the next assembly and defended himself in 1700, apparently adequately as far as the Assembly was concerned. The minutes on the matter simply read, 'It was also agreed that the defense brother **Matthew Kiffin** made in the Assembly and his acknowledgment was in the satisfaction of the Assembly.' The minutes of the meeting, however, also contain a statement of faith proposed to effect reunion with the General Association which appears to have been agreed unanimously by those present at the end of the Assembly. As **Kiffin** signed the minutes we may, I think, presume his agreement to this statement which reads in part, 'Christ is one with the Father and the Holy Ghost, and He was God manifest in the flesh. ... About the Most High God we conceive He is One Informative, Unchangeable and Eternal Spirit, and Incomprehensible Godhead; and doth subsiste in The Father, Ye Worde, and The Holie Ghoste.' This language of subsistence in the Three Persons is impeccably Orthodox, of course, and the General Association voted by a majority of two to one to accept that **Kiffin**'s case had been fully and properly dealt with. None the less, perhaps the stage was set for the Salters' Hall controversy amongst the Baptists with which I began.

6. Eighteenth Century Baptist Socinianism and closed Conservatism

Now the later decline of the General Baptists into **Socinianism** in the Eighteenth Century is a well enough known story. What needs to be stressed though, is that the Churches generally are extremely closed, Conservative, and Biblicist. Their debates are on classically sectarian matters such as marrying outside the community; they continue to argue the question of hymn-singing long after almost every tradition has settled it: Their self identification during the period as 'enclosed gardens' emphasizes this sense of locked up traditionalism.

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7. C18 Baptist and Presbyterian Unitarianism very differently derived

At this point we need to distinguish that which **Eiberney** in our opening quotation lumped together. The English Presbyterians declined into Unitarianism through the Eighteenth Century as strikingly as the General Baptists. But they did so largely through embracing the intellectual spirit of the age, and not through sectarian counter-cultural resistance. As **Olive Griffiths** rather iconically has it in a study of the Presbyterians (writing in 1935): ‘The Presbyterians cease to be tenacious of their own earlier traditions. This is not a statement one can imagine writing about the General Baptists in the first half of the Eighteenth Century.’ Strikingly, however, proto-liberal Presbyterians and profoundly Conservative General Baptists arrived at similar conclusions: *That first Christian Truth is to be found by reading the Scriptures without reference to a tradition*; and second: *What the Scriptures teach is more akin to Socinianism than Classical Christology*. Can we explain this co-incidence?

8. KIFFIN: A closing biographical note as evidence

A conclusion: ‘Now I have no doubt that a species of naturalistic historical explanation could be assayed. Amongst the General Baptists **Kiffin** was the only messenger with any sort of University education: He came up to Oxford and it was all downhill from there! He became a Baptist and as a result got ‘sent down’ (an Oxford University expression for being withdrawn by the University from his course). He was also independently wealthy, and he had a ministry lasting many decades, remaining in good health into his eighties. It was not un-natural then that his views should spread. Amongst the Presbyterians a different but equally convincing story could be told – **Griffiths** in the book I cited tries this. ‘In the normal flow of human and social history the rise and decline of ideas and organizations can sufficiently be accounted for.’ Well: ‘Yes!’

D. PART II: BAPTIST HERMENEUTIC HISTORICALLY

1D. Introduction and trajectories

1. Orientation to Part II: The transformative (?) effect of Bible reading

But you have rather rashly, you may be beginning to feel, entrusted this lecture to a Theologian. I want to examine some fairly standard claims about social and intellectual historical causation in this next section. But I am going to introduce some Dogmatic themes as well. You have asked me to talk about the transformative effect of Bible reading, or its lack. That it seems to me is a question that can only be adequately dealt with, with some sort of Theological answer whatever else we may want to say.

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2. Hermeneutic: Creed versus prevailing religious assumptions of the day?

We are alive today, in a way that the Eighteenth Century was not, to the issue of Hermeneutics. The notion of 'just reading the Bible' seems an odd one to us if we have any serious education at all. Philosophical assumptions and interpretative practices will determine the meaning we find far more than the text itself will, or so we are told. If this is right, if cultural assumptions do indeed determine 'found meaning' then it would be no surprise at all that various groups, say the Latitudinarian Anglicans, the General Baptists, and the enlightened Presbyterians all found a broadly shared meaning in Scripture that was to them at odds with the historic teaching of the Church at a particular moment in history. Each by refusing to discipline their reading practices by Creed or Confession were simply reading the prevailing religious assumptions of the day into the texts that they studied. Such an account would answer the question posed in my title nicely. But it assumes two things, only one of which I believe is acceptable. On the one hand it assumes that *the General Baptists, the Presbyterians, and we may add the Anglicans shared a cultural context*. On the other it assumes that *modern hermeneutical theory is in fact an adequate account of how we derive meaning from Scripture*. Let me take those two in that order.

2D. The Eighteenth Century (English Baptist) cultural context

1. Presbyterian and Anglican zeitgeist absorption versus Baptist insularity

First: The cultural context. At first sight the assumption seems implausible. Latitudinarian Anglicans were gaining their views from the intellectual elite of society: **Newton; Locke**; seasoned with a daring dash of French Atheism. Even the Presbyterians had their academically very impressive academies where ministers were educated, and where there is evidence that continental writings of an Arminian and more radical stripe were being actively taught. I do not suppose that any of this was the common reading matter of the General Baptist. They were consciously closing themselves off from the society around, refusing the influence of new ideas. Surely we cannot account for their doctrinal development in the same terms as that of the Presbyterians?

2. L. STARCK: "The Baptists as a C18 'Troeltschian' Sect" questioned

To make sense of this we need to consider the nature of Sectarianism, using the term in its sociological and allegedly non-judgmental sense. **Leonard Stark** in his multi-volume 'Sociology of Religion,' which uses the word 'sectarian' in an extremely sociological and very judgmental sense, treats 'Baptists' in the second volume 'Sectarian Religion'. 'Sects,' he argues, 'are not sub-cultures,' but what he calls 'counter-cultures'. They define themselves specifically against the pre-dominant values of the majority culture. He illustrates this with a battery of examples, including Quakers, English Baptists, American Shakers, early Methodism and a number of Russian movements with which I confess to being unfamiliar. This is of course a

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sophisticated re-positionisation of **Troeltch's** original 'Church-Sect' theory. The problem with this, I suspect, is that it takes self-presentation at face value. It's a common observation of all of us who deal with the history of ideas that every age is blind to what unites it. Fierce debates, wars even, can start over differences that seem like a yawning chasm to the participants, but look like minor variations on the same theme to a later history. Just so the purest form of sectarian religion will indeed narrate their own lives in terms of a complete rejection of contemporary culture; but in fact they share deep assumptions with that culture around which are much more significant than their studied contra-culturalism.

3. STEPHEN HOLMES: A contra-culture that speaks the majority language fails

My own supposition is that very few contra-cultures, at least contra-cultures that natively speak the majority language, are successfully sectarian in the pure sociological sense of the term. It is probably possible for immigrant traditions to maintain a generally sectarian existence for maybe two generations, particularly if they retain their own language and education system. Some groups in the United States of America and in Canada would be examples here. Otherwise the pressures to assimilate to prevailing philosophical notions about the nature of reality, basic meta-ethics, the nature of knowledge, what makes a good argument, and so on will just be too powerful particularly amongst a group that lacks education, and so has no language to name and warn against these insidious pressures.

4. Fundamentalist: Pre-modern pure originists or using modernity to battle itself?

Thus returning to the sociological literature, I find accounts that see the most aggressively anti-modern fundamentalist traditions as in fact basically parasitic on Modernity to be broadly convincing. As **Peter Herriot** has it: 'Fundamentalists present themselves as returning to the pure pre-modern origins of their faith as prescribed by their sacred books.' In fact, however, they use modern means to battle against Modernity, and arguable are frequently operating at a Post-Modern level of sophistication in their use of the media. As major a scholar as **Steve Bruce** could be cited to the same effect, and it is one of the major conclusions that **Martin Marti** and **Scott Appleby** drew from their massive 'Fundamentalisms' project.

5. AMBLER: The social chemistry to the C18 English Baptist Church

The General Baptists in the Eighteenth Century were largely poorly educated, rural, and working class. **Ambler's** survey of trust deeds of General Baptist Meeting Houses in Lincolnshire indicates that of the fifty three men who acted as Chapel Trustees in the period at which he looks, only one was a gentleman. One other was employed as a 'Minister of Religion.' The others included a servant, a number of labourers, many graziers, a significant number of the small-holding farmers who were unusually prevalent in the district, and then various trades-people. It seems reasonable to assume that the trustees of the Churches would have been generally more prosperous, educated,

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and socially advantaged than the broader membership. So this account tells an eloquent story of the social context of General Baptist life. Such people simply could not be expected to have the intellectual sophistication to resist the prevailing ideas of the day, or, more likely, of the generation before the day. Enclosed gardens they may have been, but seeds are carried on the wind and will take root unless the constant attentions of an expert gardener should prevent them.

6. Baptists shared the C18 epistemological hermeneutical zeitgeist

It seems to me, then, to be plausible that the General Baptists were thoroughly infected in their thinking by the sort epistemological hermeneutical assumptions that made **Socialism** an appealing prospect not just in spite of, but rather because of, their isolation from the high culture of the day. To change the metaphor: 'To be generally counter-cultural one needs to have been thoroughly inoculated against the culture by deep exposure to it. Only then can you recognize its insidious appeals and blandishments clearly enough to reject them.'

7. A concluding remark

So I am happy that the General Baptists share the cultural context with the Presbyterians and others who were also becoming Unitarian in the Eighteenth Century.

3D. The arising hermeneutical question

1. Do (current society's) philosophical assumptions determine reading?

What then of the hermeneutical question? Is it the case that our philosophical assumptions will indeed determine the meaning that we find in texts? It seems very tempting to conclude that it is. On the one hand such a conclusion would account for the historical facts that we can observe in the Eighteenth Century rather neatly. On the other, there is a considerable and very fashionable body of academic literature that makes precisely this claim. I should say that I have very deep sympathy with the sharp proposal designed to explode the myths that have surrounded our reading practices that have come forth from **Derrida**, **Foucault**, and to a lesser extent **Fisch**. The Modernist notion that we can check our pre-suppositions at the door and approach the text like some parody of an ideal scientist simply open to observe whatever we may find there *urgently needs to be utterly discredited* where it has not been already. Not only does such a reading practice lie behind the misplaced certainty of every Fundamentalism, but it has repeatedly served to legitimate misogyny, oppressive social practices, and worse within our own religious community, and it continues to do so if we are honest.

2. An hermeneutic of suspicion self-defeating: texts must and do convey meaning

Yes! I say that I am very comfortable with **Ricoeurian** hermeneutics of suspicion that ask us to see venal political attempts to improperly impose our will on others in every

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text and in every proposed reading of every text. Every decoding *is* simply a new encoding, a new rhetorical construction that will embed and improperly advance political ends. But I don't feel able to stop there and that for two reasons. On the one hand a rather trivial but telling undergraduate debating point that if this really is all that we can say then it is not a position that we can hold with any confidence. A text that purports to demonstrate the impossibility of any text demonstrating anything is rather obviously straight forwardly self defeating. An hermeneutic of suspicion then, it seems to me, should lead us to a chastened and intensely self critical reading practice. But it cannot logically lead us to despair utterly of any ability to discern meaning in a text. If the claim and play of the signifiers is in fact endless then there is no possibility of us ever discerning, let alone demonstrating that fact. Texts *are* rhetorically charged, politically compromised, and vulnerable to multiple deconstructions. But, somehow still we presume the possibility of their conveying meaning or you would be doing something other than listening to this lecture, or reading its script!

3. Scripture (sub-Christology) & interpreted by the gathered covenant community

On the other hand I am acutely conscious that when we talk about reading practices in the Eighteenth Century amongst the General Baptists we are very explicitly not talking about texts in general, but about *Holy Scripture*. As I sought to demonstrate in the paper to which I have already referred, as Baptists we have a rather particular, if not peculiar, account of the ways in which Scripture succeeds in being Revelation, that is to say, conveying meaning. The Seventeenth Century Confessions tended to treat the doctrine of Scripture as a sub-species of Christology, locating it under the active prophetic ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our present 'Declarations of Principle' (I use the plural because Baptists use a slightly different version in Scotland) insist that Christ is the sole authority in all things, and then locate the place of Scripture as a mode of transmission of His authority. They further give an account of how this authority is to be realized: It is the gathered Church only that has the liberty to interpret his laws under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In the Good Providence of God Christ speaks, and so Scripture yields its meaning in a Pneumatological event that happens when the Covenanted Community is gathered together.

4. The perspicuity of Scripture: A denominational perspective

Is this a denial of the clarity or perspicuity of Scripture? Not, I submit, in the sense of the Reformed Dogmaticians who first emphasized that teaching originally meant it, although it is a denial, and on my part an emphatic and cheerful one of a certain modern Evangelical way of claiming meaning in the text. Perspicuity was never intended to be an insistence that the meaning of Scripture was indifferent and easily available to any reader, un-regenerate as well as re-generate. Indeed, that point was specifically denied repeatedly, usually with a reference to 2 Corinthians 4:03. Rather: Perspicuity is a claim that no academic or ecclesial qualification is needed to read Scripture. The classical example is **Martin Luther's** debate with the Bishop of Rome (i.e.: The Pope). In the Bull that threatens **Luther** with excommunication ('Exsurge Domine') the Pope says,

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‘Dr Luther should give up his interpretations of Scripture because we have thoroughly investigated them. The Cardinals, the Ministers Generals of the Religious Orders, Professors of Sacred Theology and of both sources of Law Canon and Civil, have all examined them and found them to be inadequate. Further, they do not accord with the teachings of Holy Church.’ You see, the claim comes that ecclesiastical office or academic ability or Church Tradition have some special ability or confer some special ability to interpret Scripture. The Reformation can only happen when you say, ‘No!’ Because if you do, Rome has won before they start. The only qualification needed is the aid of God’s Spirit.

5. A pneumatological-academic-magisterial three way tension

Recent Evangelical, including Baptist, accounts of the clarity of Scripture is it seems to me at least and at once make it too available and too restricted. Too available, in the senses that they fail to take any account of this Pneumatological point, and so seemingly suggest, surely against all observation and evidence, that the Scripture is clear in the way that a good textbook is clear. And to restrict it, in that accepting canons of hermeneutics would suggest that some lexical or historical knowledge is necessary to determining right meaning in the text, they suggest precisely counter to the Reformation claim, that Scripture is not fully available to anyone who is graciously granted the help of God’s Spirit.

6. Baptist hermeneutic historically was infected by the zeitgeist

I suggested that despite being ‘gardens’ there is good reason to accept that the general Baptist Assemblies would have been thoroughly infected by the Spirit of the age. But that denied that we should therefore assume that they were incapable of reading Scripture, and thus inevitably condemned, caved in to the anti-metaphysical, anti-historical, and universalistic temper of the Eighteenth Century Britain. Theologically I could claim that my argument is more or less complete.

7. A Theology of Baptist hermeneutic: Construct it from Baptist history

There remains the minor troublesome factor of the history, however. I am tempted to follow the example of **Hegel** who when challenged by a student that his theories had nothing to do with reality, reportedly indicated that he felt this was much more a problem for reality than it was for him. But let me suggest instead that there might be more to be said dogmatically, and that we can find, perhaps, a Theological construction that is more in line with historical observations.

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4D. The Gathered Church interprets Scripture to know Gospel Salvation

1. A thesis proposed

A Gathered Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, should be able to read Scripture sufficiently well to know the saving truth of the Gospel. Let me interrogate both implied conditions in that statement.

2. I: The nature of ‘Gathered Church’ vis-à-vis its story

First: What is a Gathered Church? It seems to me here that some of my introductory comments about earlier work on the nature of tradition as that which precisely in the good purposes of God separates us from the primary experience of the Gospel History become important. A Gathered Church can only exist if it has some story to tell about how the saving message of Christ was transmitted to it. I do not think that there is any necessary shape to this story. It is not the case for the Baptists that an unbroken succession of Bishops must be traceable, or that a Church Book written in good copper plate handwriting must exist. But: There must be a story. It seems to me that a group of people, even a group of covenanted Baptist baptised believers who meet to read the Bible with no attention to tradition or, even worse, with conscious dis-attention to tradition, fail in some fundamental way to be the Church that is spoken of in the Baptist ‘Declaration of Principle.’

3. The Conservative nature of Baptist Church life

However, I am not going to claim that the General Baptists did this. They were as I have noted a consciously conservative people. They told their own stories repeatedly, and at least in their Assembly repeatedly recalled earlier decisions and statements. However, if we are going to look for some Theological as opposed to historical or sociological account of why attention to extra Biblical language about matters of Theology is important, then we might find it in considering the nature of what it is to be a Church along these lines. If we were daring, we might even see in the Creeds, Confessions, and Minute Books of the Churches the lively voices of members dead in the body but alive in the Lord who must be accorded a place in the community’s deliberations if it is to be a truly Gathered Church. But that seems rather too mystical a conception to me. And so I will not pursue it further.

4. II: Gathered Church under the Spirit knows the Will of Christ from Scripture

Second, and perhaps more pertinent to the case of the Baptists in the Eighteenth Century: It is only a gathered Church that is under the guidance of the Spirit that can claim to know the Will of Christ as revealed in Scripture. The rise of the new connection of General Baptists is an example of a point that seems general of the Eighteenth Century, but more difficult in other periods, that historic orthodoxy and vital religion tend to be found together or not at all. Of course we dogmaticians would like to

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claim that the causal relationship runs necessarily from dogma to life: Churches that believe the great truth of the Gospel will be Churches that are vibrant in worship, deep in spirituality and effective in service and mission. Were this to be true it would be a fine argument for the disciplined teaching of sound Theology to us as students.

5. A cautionary note vis-à-vis a Pneumatological Hermeneutic

However, at this point in my life I have to confess to rather too much knowledge of Scot's Calvinism to find the point convincing. But the case of **Dan Taylor** and particularly of some of the Churches he influences invite us to look the other way around. What if it is Spiritual vitality that tends to influence towards this doctrinal orthodoxy? Now: The problem with such an account on face value would seem to be the lack of any convincing cause or mechanism. How can experimental piety provide an impetus to any sort of doctrinal reformation? But our 'Declaration of Principle' offers the necessary mechanism in its defense of a Pneumatological Hermeneutic. That Church which is most actively open to and seeking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit is that Church which will find the life-giving truth of the Gospel when it gathers around the text of Scripture.

6. Conclusion: Hermeneutic resides in Gathered Church and The Spirit

If this is right, and I leave it as an interesting Theological thought rather than a something on which I will stake my life, it invites us to reflect more on the relationship between Piety and Doctrinal development in explicitly Theological and in specifically Baptist terms. Why can't we just read the Bible? Well: I've tried to suggest to you in this last section two answers to that question. The first is the problem is that *I* can't just read the Bible. We, if we are well constituted Gathered Church, I think can. The second is that we need Spiritual Reformation before we have any hope of advancing in doctrinal purity as we read the text of Holy Scripture. And I wonder if there finally isn't the Theological account of the decline of at least some of the General Baptist Churches in the Eighteenth Century.

Thank you for your time.

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UNIT 4: BAPTISTS & MILLENNIALISTS IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

A. INTRODUCTION

1A. Introduction to Unit 4 tutor

1. A word of welcome

Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen. I would like to welcome you to Regents' Park College this evening for the fourth in our lecture series exploring Baptist Origins that has been jointly sponsored by the Oxford Centre for Christianity and Culture and the Centre for Baptist History and Heritage. I'd like to welcome to the University of Oxford for the first time **Dr Crawford Gribben**. Crawford and I have got to know each other in one of these strange modern relationships over the years whereby we have got to know each other through e-mail correspondence, but never actually met. So it is a particular pleasure to meet Crawford in the flesh for the first time, and we are very much looking forward to hearing his lecture in just a few moments.

2. Introduction to Dr Crawford Gribben

Dr Gribben is the Longroom-Harde Senior Lecturer in Early Modern Print Culture at Trinity College, University of Dublin, Ireland, and he is a specialist in Seventeenth Century matters Millennial, Eschatological and Apocalyptic as well as coming up to the present day. He is author amongst many other works of 'God's Irishman: Theological debates in Cromwellian Ireland,' published by Oxford University Press in 2007; and also, 'The Puritan Millennium Literature and Theology 1550-1682' a revised version of which appeared last year. This unit was entitled 'A Radically different world in and out of time,' the sub-title is still 'In and Out of Time,' and I will leave him to inform you of the new title. Dr. Crawford: Thank-you.

2A. Orientation

1. Response by Dr Gribben to his welcome

Well I like to say thank you to Anthony for my first impression when I came to meet him. He has been helpful to me over very many years, and it is a pleasure to be welcomed to Regents' Park College and Community today. I have heard a good deal about it, and it is good to experience it in the flesh as well.

2. The subject of Unit 4

The subject that I would like to talk about today is 'Baptists and Millennialism in Early Modern England: In and out of time,' so there is some continuity with the title that was advertised.

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3. An eschatological call to write?

I will always remember the evening I decided to become a writer. It was sometime in the Winter of 1982. We were sitting together in the Living Room, my parents, my sister, and I. I was jotting ideas in a little notebook that I kept of occasional Bible observations. Epiphany arrived with the evening news. **Dropov** had just been appointed the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. But there in our quiet Plymouth Brethren household in South West Scotland I guessed who he really was; and I would make it my aim to expose him as the antichrist.

4. The Baptist eschatological heritage

Well, as it turned out, the book in fact that I did not write, had not in fact been destined to shape the mature politics of the late Cold War. But reading affairs through the lens of Apocalyptic Scripture I was maintaining a tradition, the long and often respectful history of which stretched back through the community of Baptist congregations of which my family was a part. These Apocalyptic concerns had often been linked to this tradition's interest in maintaining the integrity of the Church. Since the Reformation, many of those who have sought to maintain the Churchly distinction between the regenerate and the un-regenerate have also attempted to foreshorten and occasionally overturn the temporal or Theological distinction between this world and the next. In this tradition the assembly of baptized believers was described as an eschatological reality, a little heaven, an embassy in this world of the other world to come. The purity of its life of worship could be measured by the extent to which it reflected the purity of the life of worship that its members expected to enjoy forever in this idealized future world. Such was the nature of the Brethren Assembly in which I was raised, converted, and baptized. Such was the nature of many of the continental Anabaptists and British Baptist congregations to which it unconsciously owed so much. As with so many other Assemblies of 'baptized believers' throughout the centuries, the Church itself was a radically different world in and out of time.

5. Baptist other worldly ecclesiology and this worldly eschatology studied

And yet of course it is a paradox that the Evangelical Baptist tradition with the possession of an other-worldly Ecclesiology has not prevented the development of a this-worldly eschatology. And the parting of the traditions of this world eschatology as many members of your community have so eloquently noticed, has often been Millennial. These Millennial believers have ranged from early modern radicals similar to those analyzed by **Lynn Robson**, through the literary figures pursued by **Paul Fiddes**, through Nineteenth Century Strict-Baptists described by an older graduate **Ian Randall**, to contemporary evangelicals as a subject for doctoral research currently being pursued by recent graduate **Joshua Searle**. This growing body of scholarly writing has demonstrated the extent to which this combination of other worldly ecclesiology and this worldly eschatology has been sustained.

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6. The trajectory of Unit 4

In this unit therefore I want to trace the earlier ramifications of this combination of thought, and explore one stage of the tradition's gradual limiting of eschatological thinking which moves from 1609 to the present day from being an all embracing world view to become a specific locus of Theological reflection. I will pay attention to the gradual emergence of post-Millennial and pre-Millennial views and will argue that these varieties of Millennial conviction have developed in conversation with them generally to complement other Theological loci. Simultaneously I want to notice that while Millennial commitments in this tradition have changed enormously, other commitments remain largely the same. My conclusion will reflect on the evidence this provides for the deeply en-cultured nature of so much thinking about the End of Time. This unit therefore will range throughout the early Centuries of the Evangelical Baptist tradition while concentrating on those elements with which I am most familiar, that is the Particular Baptists of Early Modern England from **John Smyth**. I am going to do that even as I recognize that I am addressing members of this audience who know far more about this tradition than do I, or perhaps I ever will.

B. SEVENTEENTH & EIGHTEENTH CENTURY BAPTIST MILLENNIALISM

1B. The 1533 Anabaptist Reformation at Munster in Germany

1. The Reformation context

I want to begin with the most basic reference point of all early modern Millennial thinking, far distant from early modern Particular Baptists in space, time, and implication. I want to begin with the Anabaptist Reformation at Munster, Germany, in 1533. There's something deliberately contrary about beginning my account of this tradition with the event against which its best exponents consistently defined themselves. But this strategy allows us to pay attention to things which early modern Baptists believed that they were not. The story begins in the late 1520s in the immediate aftermath of the first wave of Reformation Iconoclasm, and in situations of exceptional social distress. The Radical Anabaptists in and around the city states of the Netherlands and North West Germany, revived old and revolutionary ideas.

2. The ministry of Melchior Hoffmann: Munster's eschatological poor

In 1532 and 1533 a number of the preachers of this foundationally unstable ideology of social change took refuge from their persecutors in the newly Lutheran town of Munster. Among their number were disciples of **Melchior Hoffmann** a wandering prophet who gained access to significant new spheres of influence after his recent conversion to the Anabaptist cause. **Hoffmann** taught his followers that a short period of signs, wonders, and apocalyptic woes would precede a Golden Age of Heaven on earth, which, he argued, would begin fifteen centuries after the crucifixion, in 1533. In

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Munster these Millennial ideas were rapidly disseminated, and turned into a mass obsession dominating the whole life of the poorer classes of the town. Among the large number of people responding to this new message was the leader of the town's recently triumphant Lutheran party, **Bernd Rothmann**, who having turned Anabaptist added to **Hoffmann's** Millennial discourse a smattering of the principles of something not unlike communism he had learned for the recently reprinted although spuriously attributed Fifth Epistle of Clement.

3. JAN MATTHIAS: Christians must actively prepare for the Millenium

The effect of this combination of high and low culture was overwhelming. There streamed into Munster a vast number of insecure and harassed proletarians mainly from the Dutch centres of early capitalism suddenly attracted by the prospect of easy living. At the same time many of the wealthy group fought this powerful Anabaptist movement supported by a mass of unemployed and desperate foreigners. Roman Catholics and Lutherans united to out-manuever the revolutionary preachers. **Hoffmann** was arrested and imprisoned in a cage until his death. But the movement's leadership was assumed by a preacher who shared little of his Quietist passivity. **Jan Matthias**, baker turned preacher, taught his followers that their duty was not simply to wait for the Millennium, but actively to prepare for it, if necessary by the violent disruption of the political status-quo. He identified two visiting preachers as Enoch and Elijah, the two witnesses expected in the final days. The town irrupted into mass hysteria under the impact of their preaching, and many of the wealthy made rapid plans to flee. The leadership of this now largely Anabaptist community issued proclamations which identified the town as a centre to which the Godly should resort. Munster was the New Jerusalem, the only place of safety when the earth would be destroyed at Easter 1534.

4. JOHN OF LEIDEN: The 1535 revolution

The results were dramatic. Streets were lit by bonfires of books, paintings and sculptures looted from the Cathedral. The 'Dutch prophets,' as the two witnesses were known, dominated public life. They ordered the expulsion of all remaining Lutherans and Roman Catholics, and commanded that anyone remaining in the town refusing to be re-baptised was immediately to be put to death. By the end of February the city was under siege. Inside private property was abolished, all books with the exception of the Bible were forbidden, polygamy was established, marriages with unbelievers were broken, and every woman of marriageable age was compelled to find an husband. Then the eschatological identity of the more dominant of the witnesses was revealed. **Jan Bartleson**, a tailor, better known as **John of Leiden** was proclaimed 'Messiah of the Last Days,' the man who would become the universal king. The regime advanced its relentlessly political religion and **Bartleson** and his wife lived in ostentatious luxury as Munster was plunged into a totalitarian reign of terror. But the glory and the horror of Munster was not to endure. By April 1535 the town was being ravaged by famine, by June its walls had been overcome by the besieging armies of Lutheran and Roman

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Catholic power. By January 1536 the leaders of the movement had been entirely destroyed. The Millennial hopes of **John of Leiden** and his thousands of followers had disappeared.

6. Munster: An example of the power of Mediaeval apocalyptic ideologies

These notorious events provide an extreme example of the enduring power and appeal of Mediaeval apocalyptic ideologies in the period of early modernity. They demonstrate both continuity and change in the patterns of eschatological belief that had extended throughout the course of the Christian Centuries demonstrating believer's continual temptation to find doctrinal guidance outside the boundaries of the Biblical Canon and to combine religious and political hope in an eschatological vision of social, political, and moral revolution.

7. Anabaptists: Circulating ideas suppressed in the Mediaeval Centuries

And yet, in the early days of Reformation it was the Evangelical opponents of the Munster revolutionaries who were first off with doing something new. Anabaptists maintained and developed ideas that have circulated widely, and been violently suppressed in the Mediaeval Centuries. Their magisterial reformers adopted confessions that very often represented a radical disjunction in the history of Christian eschatology.

2B. Early Seventeenth Century Baptist eschatology

1. The language of eschatology in the face of the Church-State project

English Baptists in succeeding Centuries would draw on both approaches to develop distinctive patterns of a deliberately Millennial Hope. These Millennial commitments emerged out of the apocalyptic world view that was adopted by many early English Baptists. In the early 1600s these believers repeatedly employed eschatological language in their development of Ecclesiology, and ecclesiological language in their elaboration of eschatological hope. **John Smyth** whose gathering of the first modern English Baptist 'Believer's' Church is being remembered by this course you are studying being compiled in 2009, defended his revolutionary churchmanship in a book called, *'The Characteristics of the Beast,'* or *'The false constitution of the Church discovered'* (1609), and routinely attacked his 'Paedo-Baptist' enemies as 'anti-Christians'. This investment in apocalyptic rhetoric was shared by others in the Baptist tradition who would have shared little of **Smyth's** later theory of General Redemption. **Christopher Blackwood**, one of the most outspoken of the Particular Baptists in the Seventeenth Century published, *'The storming of anti-Christ in his two last and strongest garrisons of compulsion of conscience and infants' baptism,'* in 1644, in which he complains of the basic assumptions of the State-Church project. The enemies of the early Baptists had good cause to complain of their frequent resorting to the language of eschatological violence.

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2. The 1644 London Particular Baptist ‘Confession of Faith’

The early modern Baptists retreated from the most radical of their eschatological commitments when they came to write their ‘Confessions of Faith.’ In part, I think, that muting, that mutation can be explained from the discipline of Confessing Faith in the order and balanced required in the genre. The ‘Confession of Faith’ published by seven of the Particular London Baptist Churches in 1644 marked the emergence of a distinctive Calvinistic Baptist Movement, according to its most recent historian. And therefore it took care to distinguish its roots from the Munster Revolutionaries with whom it had been maliciously identified. This document made that distinction in its contents but also in its title. It was advertised as a ‘Confession of Faith of seven congregations or Churches of Christ in London which are commonly but unjustly called ‘Anabaptists’’ in 1644. The Confession confirmed the right of private property, and encouraged obedience to civil authorities whose divine institution it recognized albeit in varying degrees and with subsequent additions. In Theological terms it confirmed the basic tenets of orthodox Calvinism drawn from the literature of the earlier Separatist tradition, and it took care to distance its appearance from the less Theologically coherent General Baptists. But it was obviously differing from the evolving conclusions of other Calvinistic Puritans. In marked contrast to the Irish Articles of 1615 and The Westminster Confession of Faith then under negotiation, the 1644 Baptist Confession refused to refer to God as Trinity or to use the Three Persons motif. And most importantly, in contrast to the many of the most vocal representatives of the early Baptist movement, they refused to identify the Pope as antichrist or to attack Paedo-Baptists as Anti-Christians. Delegates of the Westminster Assembly denounced the Confession as ‘unutterably radical.’ Nevertheless there was no question, but there was a working in a conservative fashion to limit the application of eschatological ideas and to choral within a specific eschatological locus. This interest in Millennial reduction was not an indication that these early Particular Baptists were slackening in their eschatological commitments. The Confession represented the seven subscribing Churches as themselves an eschatological reality, a mirror of the seven Churches addressed in ‘Revelation’ Chapters two and three.

3. The Confession Churches passive sufferers not Fifth Monarchists

This is hardly a suggestion of Fifth Monarchist sympathies, not least because the ‘Confession’ repudiated any notion that the moral law had any public function outside the community of believers, an assumption on which the Fifth Monarchist Movement was based. Instead the ‘Confession’ presented the subscribing Churches as eschatologically committed understanding their role as passive sufferers, not as aggressive conquerors in the hostile world of early modern England. But they were certain that suffering would not continue forever. The Confession argued that Christ’s kingly power shall be more fully manifested when He shall come in glory to reign among the saints, and when he shall put down all rule and authority under his feet. It was therefore appropriate that the text ended with a prayer, ‘Come Lord Jesus! Come quickly!’ This was not a Millennial Hope. The ‘Confession’ Scriptures did not include

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any reference to Revelation 21 verses one to ten. But neither was the Millennial Hope forbidden.

3B. Baptist eschatology in the Civil Wars, Protectorate, and Restoration

1. Baptists help run and undermine the Cromwellian administration

Particular Baptists took up the challenge of elaborating their particular commitment in the chaos and opportunity of the English Civil Wars period (1642-1645, and 1648-1649). The set of Churches which published the first 'Particular Baptist Confessions of Faith' could hardly have imagined the events of the next fifteen years: Civil wars, regicide, constitutional revolution, and the dis-establishment of the National Church. They never could have anticipated that their commitment to passive suffering would so easily have been reversed as Baptists took a leading role in establishing and then apparently working to undermine the Cromwellian Administrations. Throughout these years their proper relationship with the government changed dramatically.

2. The General Baptist Standard Confession of 1660: An apocalyptic element

But the cause continued to expand. The movement across England, Wales, and Ireland, grew from around seven churches in London in 1644 to number one hundred and thirty by 1660. Throughout the period, the Movement's most prominent spokesmen continued to bypass Millennial expectation to invest in apocalyptic rhetoric. Thus the 'Confession of Faith' produced by the ministers who gathered in a Particular Baptist Midland Association in 1655 confessed only that, 'At the appointed time of the Lord the dead bodies of all people, just and unjust, shall rise again out of their graves. They only receive according to what they have done in their bodies whether good or evil.' Similarly the General Baptist standard Confession of 1660 (the year of the Restoration of King Charles II as monarch to the thrones of the United Kingdom) who like many others worried that **Socinians** were falsely called, 'Anabaptists' allowed that the General Resurrection at the end of History shall be followed by a period in which the saints shall inherit the kingdom reigning together with Christ. Again, this is hardly Millennial for the discussion made no reference to Revelation 21 verses one to ten.

3. The Baptist orthodox creed of 1678: No millennial or eschatological element

But things changed with the Restoration of the United Kingdoms Monarchy in 1660, as the heady days of a world turned upside down by political upheaval gave way to new political realities in which the possibilities of an immanent Millennial reign looked increasingly improbable as 'Baptised Believers' experienced increased legislative pressure. Even the hint of Millennial possibility that was allowed in the 'Standard Confession' disappeared in the Baptist 'Orthodox Creed' of 1678 which attempted to unify as far as possible the General Baptist and the Particular Baptist communities in the face of Christological error, and the political threats of Popery. Reflecting its adherence in negotiating an identified centre of English Baptist life, the 'Orthodox

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Creeds' entirely bypassed the Millennial theories held by believers on both sides of the Baptist Movement in favour of an emphasis on the Last Judgment that was shared by all.

4B. Baptist eschatology in the Glorious Revolution and later Seventeenth Century

1. The 1688 Glorious Revolution: Baptist Millennialism downplayed

In the aftermath of the Restoration, therefore, leading Baptists from both the General and the Particular Communities took care to distance themselves from the excesses of the Revolutionary Millennial Tradition. And they did so as leaders from across the Dissenting Denominations including **John Bunyan**, **Thomas Brookes**, and **Thomas Goodwyn** joined forces to repudiate the Radical Legacy. But many of these leaders continued to revert to Millennial tropes. In 1682 **Bunyan's** 'The Holy City' drew upon Millennial language to recast ideas of Puritan Conversion. In 1688 **Hansford Knowles** believed he was awaiting the immanent commencement of the Millennium, and **Benjamin Keatch** was likewise expecting the Glorious Revolution (i.e.: the Protestant Monarchs William and Mary of Orange assuming the thrones of the United Kingdom in 1688) to be the harbinger of Millennial Blessings. As a movement, however, the Particular Baptists played down this Millennial emphasis, and when their leaders met in a General Assembly in 1689, they adopted as their Creed a confession of faith which had significantly retreated from the claims of the Savoy Declaration on which it had been largely based. The Savoy declaration had argued that we expect in the Latter Days antichrist being destroyed, the Jews called, and the adversaries of the Kingdom of His Dear Son broken, the Churches of Christ being edified and enlarged through a large and plentiful communication of Light and Grace, to enjoy in this world a more quiet, glorious, and peaceable condition, than they have enjoyed.' In 1689 this paragraph was simply struck from the record of the most important Particular Baptist text of the later Seventeenth Century.

2. The 1689 General Assembly

The Confession that was adopted by the General Assembly in 1689 had been drawn up in 1677. Its composition was related to the fact that the 1644 text was becoming increasingly difficult to find. **Benjamin Keatch**, for example, who moved from the General to the Particular Baptist Community, first encountered the 1644 text in 1691. Furthermore, a New Confession was clearly being demanded by the changing circumstances in which Baptists now found themselves. Although its early readers may not have realized, this New Confession was evidently indebted to the approaching contents of the 1644 text, even though its relationship to the Westminster Confession of Faith, and its revision in the Savoy Declaration was more obvious. It appears that the decision to use the format of the Confessions of more mainstream denominations was calculated to emphasize the commonality between dissenting communities. But similarities existed in content as well as in format. The new Confession adopted a normalized Covenant Theology, one which allowed much less emphasis on the novelty

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of 'New Covenant' than did the first Confession. It adopted a much less rigorous position on the Admission of non-baptized believers to the Lord's Supper, and allowed that 'non-baptised' believers could become members of Particular Baptist Churches.

3. A lack of ecclesiology, a quietist eschatology: But, 'Come Lord Jesus!'

Despite these Ecclesiological novelties the New Confession found broad support across the Particular Baptist Movement, and was published by the General Assembly in 1689. This most influential and important of all Baptist Confessions was subsequently adopted with minor amendments by the Philadelphia Association (U.S.A.) in 1742, and form the basis of numerous Church Covenants and Confessions in the later Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries on both sides of the Atlantic. But whatever it is lacking in Ecclesiology, the New Confession was politically acquiescent, and Quietist in Eschatological terms, and consistent with the tradition it represented, it expressed its eschatological hopes without any reference to Revelation 20. But this caution did not preclude its concluding on the note of joyful hope with which the 1644 Confession, the Westminster Confession, and the Savoy Declaration had also concluded, 'Come Lord Jesus! Come quickly!'

5B. Eighteenth Century Baptist Millennialism

1. Early Eighteenth Century Millennial language calm and withdrawn

So Particular Baptists ended the Seventeenth Century with this note of retreat from Millennial infestment. Ironically, it was in the Eighteenth Century that these believers grew most obviously interested in the Millennial question. Ironical, that is, because the secondary literature on the history of Evangelical Millennialism regularly assumes that Millennial convictions became increasingly subdued in the period of the Early Enlightenment. It is true that millennial language becomes calmer. It is also true that there is very little real evidence that Millennial thought and prophetic expectation becomes secularized, marginalized, or internalized in the Eighteenth Century whether among Baptists or elsewhere. In an earlier part of the period there were Anglican Theologians who were best known for maintaining the expectation of the Millennium. As the Eighteenth Century progressed and as Latitudinarian and moderate clergy dominated within the establishment, Millennialism was increasingly associated with the horrors of Regicide and civil war. In making it clear that the most natural form of Millennial expectation was now an Evangelical Dissent and the Millennial interests of the centres could be sustained as in the extended correspondences about the meaning of Revelation 20 verses one to ten between two Welsh Baptist Ministers **Benjamin Francis** and **Joshua Thomas**.

2. 1730: The emergent three positions: Post, Pre, and A Millennial

But it was in contexts like these that the range of acceptable Millennial positions delineated in the mid-Seventeenth Century continued to be refined. The exegetical

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variety, even chaos, of the earlier period eventually gave way to the delineation of three discrete interpretative paradigms: A-Millennialism, with its cautious conservation of Reformation Millennial opinion; Pre-Millennialism which often retained something of this earlier political edge; and Post-Millennialism which came to dominate the Evangelical Movement after this emergence in the 1730s. There is some evidence that these evolving patterns of eschatological commitment were shaped by wider Theological as well as natural, national, and denominational factors. It is no surprise, for example, that Pre-Millennialism was often favoured by High Calvinists like the Anglican **Augustus Toplady** and the Baptist **John Gill** with their strong emphasis on Divine intervention; no surprise too that Post-Millennialism was often favoured by moderate or Evangelical Calvinists like the Congregationalist **Jonathan Edwards** or the Baptist **Andrew Fuller** with their strong, often synergistic, expectations related to missions and revival. But Millennial Theologies would also express in defiance of wider cultural trends. Some High Calvinists like **Gill** wrapped up their Pre-Millennial convictions, even as others of the new denomination embraced the optimism of the Evangelical Movement and moved to a more moderate Calvinism and a Post Millennial Faith.

3. WHITBY: Revival and Eighteenth Century Liberal post-Millennialism

Nevertheless this popular fascination with prophecy and apocalyptic ran entirely counter to the mainstream intellectual trends of the period which witnessed the rise of a Liberal Post-Millennialism associated with **Daniel Whitby**. **Whitby** was an Anglican (Church of England) clergyman and Biblical Commentator. He celebrated anti-Calvinist polemic: ‘Discourse on the five points’ (1710) drew responses from **John Gill** ‘In the cause of God and Truth’ (1735), and **Jonathan Edwards** in his ‘Freedom of the Will’ (1754). **Whitby**’s early and extreme Arminian sentiments seem to have given way to Arian convictions,, and his often anonymous interventions into Theological debates appeared to have encouraged the general rise of anti-Trinitarian Theology among English Dissenters. But **Whitby** also drew fire for his Millennial beliefs, and his expectation that human society would progress naturally into religious, social, and cultural prosperity of the kind he expected in the Latter Days.

4. WHISTON, ISAAC NEWTON, and late Eighteenth Century Millennialists

So Millennial study was narrowing in its appeal. But amongst its devotees there could still be numbered some of the most significant minds of the period. **Sir Isaac Newton** combined Enlightenment categories of knowledge with a continuing fascination with Biblical accounts of the End of the World on which he wrote more than he did on the Natural Science for which he is best remembered. **William Whiston**, **Newton**’s successor as a Cambridge mathematician and famous as a translator of the works of the Roman Jewish historian ‘**Josephus**,’ advanced this combination of high and low cultures in his privately expressed conviction that the Temple would be rebuilt, the Jews would be restored to the Promised Land, and the Millennium begun by 1766. But he also indemnified **Mary Todd** who is reported in a freak situation as having given

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birth to sixteen rabbits as a fulfillment of a prophecy in 1 Esdras (an Apocryphal Book). Later in his life **Whiston** rejected the Trinitarian Faith and abandoned the Church of England in favour of being a minister of a congregation of General Baptists. But there is no evidence that he abandoned his distinctive eschatological hopes. A useful reminder of the commonality of Millennial beliefs across the denominational spectrum.

5. EDWARDS, WATTS and Millennialism in the C18 USA Great Awakenings

In North America a wave of speculation that the Millennium was immanent was unleashed with the remarkable event of the great Awakening in the 1730s and 1740s. In the midst of this excitement, **Jonathan Edwards**, Enlightenment Philosopher and Calvinist Theologian wondered whether the long expected latter-day glory could be beginning on American soil. His ideas were adopted and adapted for British Evangelical use by their importers, among them **Isaac Watts** (the well known Hymn writer) whose preface to **Edwards** narratives of surprising conversions insisted that, ‘since the first ages of Christianity there have been recorded no event of the kind so surprising as the present narrative has set before us. It certainly becomes us,’ **Watts** continued, ‘who profess the Religion of Christ to take notice of such astonishing exercises of His power and mercy, and give Him the glory which is His due when he begins to accomplish any of His promises concerning the Latter Days.’ ‘Come Lord Jesus! Come Quickly!’ said **Watts**, ‘and spread that dominion to all the ends of the earth.’

6. The new Evangelical Post-Millennial Hope

It was a Post-Millennial expectation that **Andrew Fuller** was to develop later in his writing. This shared Post-Millennialism advanced the intellectual trends of the Eighteenth Century in that it provided a means by which Protestants accommodated Apocalyptic Hope to Enlightenment ideals of rational order, human fallenness and Divine benevolence. In part this was related to the most fundamental assumptions of the new Evangelical Movement that was beginning to emerge. Rooted in a new epistemological confidence, as **David Bebbington** has argued, this New Evangelical Movement shared a uniformly Post-Millennial hope, and this was in absolute keeping with the rational spirit of the age. For as **Ryall Knox** reminded his modern readers in his classical investigation of Enthusiasm, ‘The age of Enlightenment was also an age of Fanaticisms.’

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D. JOHN GILL

1D. Gill's achievements, significance, and contexts

1. GILL: Father of hyper-Calvinism

This combination of Enlightenment and Fanaticisms was particularly evident in the contribution to the Millennial debate of one of the most prominent Particular Baptists, the well known Hebraist and notorious high Calvinist **John Gill**. There has been a recurring interest in **Gill** as a Theologian in a range of recent literature, and he has become somewhat stereo-typed as the 'father of Hyper-Calvinism.' This typology fails to do justice to his wider achievements or to appreciate his real significance in the context of wider trans-Atlantic Evangelicalism in the Mid to Late Eighteenth Century. Particularly his eschatology has not received the attention that it deserved. Whatever his modern significance, **Gill's** contemporary reputation rested upon his Prophetic Studies.

2. GILL: Promoter of Baptist Pre-Millennialism

His first biographer, **John Ripon** noted that **Gill's** sermons and prophetic subjects have been of late years some of the most popular of his works. Their deserved value had been evidenced by the several editions through which they passed. These sermons with the two folio volumes on the prophets and his exposition of 'Revelation' have 'gained **Gill** unfading honours,' **Ripon** believed. 'And it compels those who study prophecy to admit that,' **Ripon** continued, 'if the works of **Dr Gill** embrace almost any branch of Sacred Theology, prophecy is his forte.' But **Gill's** work was also divisive. For during the Second Great Awakening English Baptists could be distinguished in their eschatology between those who followed **Gill** with his Pre-Millennialism, and those who followed **Fuller** and his Post-Millennialism.

3. Gill and the link between Mission and Hyper-Calvinism

These Millennial theories were understood to have a wider significance, especially in terms of the Missionary interests that the Particular Baptists were then developing. It was too easy for contemporaries to identify Post-Millennialism and the Moderate Calvinism with which it was often associated with the missionary zeal surrounding **William Carey** (for further details on **Carey** c.f.: PICC M.A./M.Th Course 'Missiology') and the emerging Baptist interest in Missions; or the Pre-Millennialism and the High Calvinism with which it was so often associated, with the suspicion of Missionary activity often associated with **Gill** and the Hyper-Calvinist he was believed to represent.

4. The Courtyard Declaration of Faith

Gill worked to rehabilitate the Baptist Millennial faith by expressing it in ecclesiological terms. He understood that eschatological thinking should be read in the

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context out of which it emerged. It was for this reason that he was so profoundly aware of the shortcomings of earlier English Baptists. ‘In a previous Century,’ he lamented, ‘some good men have fixed the time of Christ’s Second Coming or His personal reign and the Millennium in which they being mistaken had brought the doctrine into disgrace and great neglect.’ This neglect was something **Gill** was careful to avoid when he took over as Pastor of the Horsley Down Courtyard Chapel in 1697. He inherited the Confession of Faith that had been drawn up by his predecessor **Benjamin Keatch**. Although **Keatch** had advanced this confession as a modification of that endorsed by the General Assembly of Particular Baptists in 1689, **Gill** was unhappy with certain ambiguities which he feared could be exploited by the General Baptists whose long standing Arminianism and occasional Arianism he deplored. In 1729 he provided the Church with a new doctrinal statement, ‘The Courtyard Declaration of Faith,’ which the congregation readily accepted. Reflecting the early moderation of his earlier career, its article on eschatology failed to advance on earlier Baptist Confessions of Faith: ‘We believe that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust, and that Christ will come a second time to judge both quick and dead. But He will take vengeance on the wicked and introduce His own people into His Kingdom and His Glory, where they shall be for ever with Him.’

5. In the cause of God and Truth

But just as other aspects of **Gill**’s Theology would develop from his initial conservatism, so this very basic orthodox eschatology would be significantly qualified as **Gill** wrestled both with the exposition of Scripture and the Liberal Post-Millennialism of his contemporary **Daniel Whitby** who’s writing was a target of **Gill**’s polemic ‘In the cause of God and Truth.’ **Gill**’s journey towards the eschatological certainty of his later career can be charted through the pages of his massive exposition of the Old and New Testaments, the doctrinal teaching of which he consolidated in the first Baptist Systematic Theology, his ‘Body of Divinity,’ (1769-1770). **Gill** was moving against the trend of Eighteenth Century dissent to reclaim the Millennial Hope. He dismissed the gross and carnal objections which some that have born the Christian name have entertained of the Millennial, ‘as if, he said, ‘their notions savoured more of a Turkish paradise than of the Kingdom of Christ.’ ‘Such doctrines,’ he claimed, ‘have brought disgrace on the doctrine of the Kingdom, and given disgust to pious and spiritual minds. But now,’ he insisted, ‘in the manner in which I conceive it the Millennium has been cleared of such absurdities and represented as quite unclogged and free from such an objection.’

6. The Destruction of the ungodly

So **Gill** was forthright in his Pre-Millennial commitments. He argued that all the Old Testament saints as well as New would have a part in the First resurrection and share in the Millennium reign. This First resurrection which would initiate the Millennium would accompany the Return of Christ and would lift believers from earth just as the Judgment of God was being poured out upon it. The ungodly who were found to be that

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at His Second Coming would be destroyed in this conflagration. ‘The wicked shall be ashes under the soles of their feet,’ he quoted, ‘which words shall be literally fulfilled,’ he explained. ‘For the wicked being burnt and their ashes mixed with that matter which will form the new earth, and be interred in it. Saints who dwell on it will in a literal sense tread on them. And they will be not as ashes but really ashes under the soles of their feet.’ This judgment of the Wicked would also involve the cleansing of the old creation.

7. The literal fire of the Judgement Day

Gill asserted a literal, very self consciously literal understanding of the cleansing of the new heavens and earth by the fires of judgment. Following the earlier argument of **Thomas Collier**, **Gill** asserted that literal fire would penetrate and renovate a literal earth during the period of time that believers would be raised by the First resurrection to meet with the Lord in the air. ‘By the time of their descent along with Christ and glorified saints from every age in Church History, they will be let down, millions and millions of them,’ he said, ‘even the whole General Assembly and Church of the Firstborn to a creation which is totally transformed back into a state of Paradise.’ This new heavens and new earth will be clear of all these things: No storms of hail; no storms of snow; no blustering storms and tempests; no flashes of lightning and peals of thunder. Rather, pure, serene, and tranquil air quite suited to the bodies of raised saints. Moreover, the air will now be cleared of devils which of their residence in it the devil is called the ‘Prince of the power of the air,’ and of the posse of devils which dwell in the air. The New Earth similarly will be refined and renewed and restored to its Paradisical state. With the curse removed no effort will be required to cultivate the soil, although in any case with immortal and sinless inhabitants there will be no need of corporal food, only of entertainment for the mind, and of enlightenment, in the Millennium. Guarding against criticism which had been leveled at Puritan Pre-Millennialists, **Gill** admitted that Christ’s Kingdom is not of this world, and, non, never will be. ‘This has been the mistake of many, fancying that the Millennium will be in the present earth which has given the adversaries of the doctrine an occasion to object to it as subversive of civil government, and as encouraging sedition and rebellion in the commonwealths.

8. The Millennium yet to come and Gill’s political passivity

But **Gill**’s apparent political passivity actually betrayed his critique of contemporary politics. His assertion that the Millennial Kingdom was not of this earth proved that the thousand year reign of Christ and the saints could not have begun as A-Millennialists and Post Millennialists both suggested. But faced with the daunting task of defending a doctrine which had been consistently outlawed by the Church Fathers and the early Protestant Creeds to which he often appealed, **Gill** rushed to provide supplementary evidence. Like earlier Puritan and Protestant commentators alike, he appealed to the verdict of history against the established claim that the Millennium had begun and perhaps even ended in the past. ‘Now if any such thing can be shown in which the nations of the world, not any of them, were not so far under the influence and deception

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of Satan as not to be drawn into idolatry nor to embrace false doctrines and go to evil practices, nor to be excited to persecute the saints for the space of a thousand years. And that the Church of Christ during such a time has been in a state of perfect purity and peace, free from being disturbed and distressed by idolaters, heretics, and persecutors. Then may these thousand years be said to be passed. But if this cannot be made to appear, then most certainly they are yet to come.'

2D. GILL's Apology for his Pre-Millennial stance

1. Revelation 20 remains as yet unfulfilled

Using these criteria, **Gill** roundly dismissed those attempts made by earlier Puritans like **John Foxe**, the annotators of the **Geneva Bible**, or even **Archbishop Ussher** to keep the Millennium in the past. He pointed to the heresies of the First Three Centuries of Church History to point out that Satan could not then have been bound. He pointed to the gradual introduction and prevalence of pagan ceremonies in Christ's Church to show that Satan could not have been bound after the rise of Constantine the Great (312 A.D. and forward), 'when the antichrist usurped the Church, and that vile impostor Mohammed under instigation of the devil arose when the bottomless pit was opened and out of it came the smoke of the absurd Al-Quran which darkened the sun and moon, the light of a great part of the world,' I quote. **Gill** also pointed to the persecutions made against their fathers and echoed **Richard Baxter**'s estimated of two hundred thousand victims of the Irish rebellion of 1641 to show that the Millennium could not have commenced before then. The eventual Seventeenth Century English crisis itself demonstrated that the prophecies of Revelation 20 were as yet unfulfilled.

2. The disorder of the Church, its purifying, and Christ's Second Coming

But **Gill**'s 'best proof' was the disorder of the Church. The Church, for **Gill**, was 'insufficiently other-worldly' and therefore evidence that the age was insufficiently other-worldly too. Put bluntly: There simply weren't enough Baptist Churches for **Gill**'s age to be the Millennium. **Gill** believed that a purer system of Church order would be a feature of the future. They also argued that the restoration of Biblical Church organization would be accomplished well before the Millennium actually begun. **Gill** was also, like earlier Puritans, arguing that the Millennial experience of believers could be very different from their Spiritual Experiences in the present age. 'The Millennium ought not to be merely identified with physical changes, as some had claimed,' he argued. 'There would have been no restitution of the brook creatures to the Paradisical state which, so far as I can see, have no use,' he wrote. 'The essence of the transformation will be Spiritual,' he argued, 'but every believer glorified into the Perfect Image of Christ.' At Christ's Second Coming the work of Grace and its uttermost extent and influence on the soul and body will be completed, and they will be unblameable before Him, and their bodies redeemed from mortality, corruption, and death. Believers will be rewarded according to their life on earth during this Millennium. They would reign as judges with Christ but dwell secure from the

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intrusions of sin and sinners, these believers must needs be blessed since they will always be before the throne, and serve the Lord day and night, and hunger and thirst no more. They shall be free from evils of every kind, and death in every shape, and every sort. There shall be perfect enjoyment of the Presence of Christ. They will be holy in body, being raised in purity, in corruption and glory, like the glorious body of Christ, and in soul be perfectly sanctified and entirely free from sin.

3. The devil bound – and Paradise Baptist!

During the time of the Millennial reign, ‘the devil will be bound with a great chain, greater though shorter than that with what he is now held,’ **Gill** argued, ‘and with which he will be bound faster, and closer, and laid under greater restraints than he now is so that he shall not be able to do the heart a mischief and practice a deceit among the nations that he now does.’ With the devil bound and the wicked annihilated, the New earth would be **Gill**’s Baptist Paradise.

4. The state of the wicked and the saints at the General Resurrection

And yet, the Millennium would not simply pass into eternity without the Resurrection and General Judgment of the Wicked. ‘Those Wicked who witness the Return of Christ will wail and mourn feeling His wrath and vengeance they justly deserve,’ **Gill** said. ‘One thousand years later, when they are raised for Judgments, they will see Him as their judge on a throne of glory and stand before Him small and great, and tremble at the sight of Him.’ But this Resurrection would occasion the final rebellion of Satan’s host and provide evidence that Hell has no purgative power. ‘As they died enemies to Christ and the saints, they will arise such,’ **Gill** stated. ‘Hell and the grave will make no difference in them, they will be in a readiness and rise to the same malicious and revengeful spirit, and all will be a mad enterprise to attack saints in their mortal state who cannot die. And Christ the King of Kings is the head of them. Yet when it is considered they will rise as weak and feeble, as unable to resist temptation and as capable of deceptions as ever, and fraught with being buoyed up with their own number and the possea of devils at the head of them, and especially considering the desperateness of their case and this their last struggle to deliver themselves from eternal ruin. It may not so much be wondered at that they should engage in a strange undertaking.’ ‘The defeat of the devil and his host by Christ will be necessitated, if only because of His power, but also of His announced determination to judge the wicked.’

5. Gill’s contribution to Seventeenth Century and later eschatology

Gill’s Neo-Puritan Millennialism confirms **Richard Muller**’s verdict that after the Bible, the main positive points for **Gill**’s Theology are with the Great Reformed and Puritan writers of the Seventeenth Century. He is the pivotal figure in the development of the Calvinistic Millennial Hope. **Gill** bridges the intense optimism of Seventeenth Century Post-Millennialism and the intense pessimism of Nineteenth Century Pre-Millennialism by happily embracing central elements of both with innocent anticipation

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of the course of Providential History, and the future Restoration of the Church in and out of time. Standing on the shoulders of **Benjamin Keatch** whose pulpit he inherited, and anticipating the robustly Pre-Millennial faith of **C.S.Birchin**, who succeeded him in the same Pastorate, **Gill** exercised an important influence on the gradual moulding of Millennial Faith among English Non-Conformists. Demonstrating an innovative Theological approach, **Gill** gave a firm defense in uncertain days of the body of Divinity that he inherited from earlier Particular Baptists. Although a dogged defender of the Calvinistic Faith, **Gill**'s interests were too extensive and expansive to allow the insulation of Soteriology that he inherited from the Sixteenth Century Reformers. The Salvation he enjoyed was certain to transform all of God's Creation in the final consummation of the ages.

6. Gill on 'When shall all these things be?'

So **Gill** charted the Pre-Millennial fulfillment of Biblical Prophecy in robustly optimistic not pessimistic terms. But this was, as **Ronald Knox** might remind us, 'a Theology of Enlightenment fanaticism.' Despite his complaints about Seventeenth Century Baptist Millennialists, **Gill** contended that the reign of the Anti-Christ would end in 1866, and that Jews would be converted and settle in Israel by 1896, and that by 1941 the Islamic Empire would be destroyed, and the Gospel and a Biblical Ecclesiology spread throughout the world. 'Happy therefore will he be that comes to this date,' said **Gill**, 'These will be happy, halcyon days indeed.' (I wonder how **Gill** was being read in 1941 during the fierce battles of World War II in Europe!) 'But these things could not be said with precision,' he admitted, 'and in any case the time of the Second Coming and of the personal appearance of Christ and of the Millennium cannot be known hereby.' These events for **Gill** were merely signs of Christ's Spiritual Reign, and the halcyon age they pre-staged. The more near signs of what will more nearly precede Christ's Personal and Second Coming are the Spiritual reign and what will introduce that – the destruction of Anti-Christ, the call of the Jews, and numerous conversions of Gentiles through the general spread of the Gospel.

7. The heritage of GILL on mission and the spread of the Gospel

Despite numerous accusations of an anti-missionary bias, it seemed clear that **Gill** expected the Gospel to sweep across the earth. His only doubt was as to when that would be, and he argued his case with Enlightenment means driving towards fanatical conclusions. **Gill** successfully defended the propriety of Millennial Faith, but his doubts about the eschatological propriety of mission lingered long in the minds of English Particular Baptists. His ideas were developed by English Strict-Baptists in the Nineteenth Century, and they took **Gill**'s Millennialism into the margins of denominational influence they seemed content to inhabit. Others combined his Calvinism with a robust enthusiasm for international expansion, or for a more general variety of Evangelical Christianity. This relationship found its greatest and Nineteenth Century exponent in **C.H.Spurgeon** who in his preaching of details of Millennial Hope appeared to oscillate according to his text and wider context.

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3D. Concluding perspectives

1. The Baptist Millennial tradition post-Spurgeon

But the Baptist Millennial tradition continued to develop, and reified Pre-Millennialism found its more zealous defenders among the Plymouth Brethren whose eschatologically driven passivity **Spurgeon** so famously lamented. But their Millennial Hope was entirely lacking in ecclesiological vision. At the beginning of this Twenty First Century English Baptists appear to have generally retreated from any kind of Millennial expectation, and among those who prize most highly the Particular Baptist tradition, the Pre-Millennialism of these earlier generations appears to have given way to the Post-Millennialism associated with such a constituency defining British Reformed Baptist publications as 'Reformation Today' or the A-Millennialism associated with this movements' eminent American Seminaries.

2. Three Conclusions

This brief survey of Baptist Millennialism in Early Modern England allows a number of conclusions to be briefly drawn.

- (1) First: While Millennial commitments in this tradition have changed enormously, other commitments have remained largely the same. I think that this demonstrates the basic integrity of the Baptist ecclesial idea, and also the stubbornness with which it has been held. It's useful to reflect over the last four hundred years the basic shape of the 'Believers' Church' has remained essentially the same, even as the eschatological commitments of its members have changed enormously.
- (2) Second: I think that this evolution of eschatological concern provides evidence of the deeply en-cultured nature of so much thinking about the end of time. Throughout their tradition, it seems, English Baptists have expected in their eschatology, even as they have attempted to realize in their ecclesiology, a radically different world. And yet their ecclesiology has often served as a foil for their eschatology. The rather static form of the Church highlights the enormous flexibility of eschatological thinking across the Baptist Centuries.
- (3) And Third: You need to remember that I was in fact wrong about the eschatological prospects of **Eurean Dropov**. I no longer regard him as a candidate for the role of the Anti-Christ, but might explore the possibilities of my current suspects and candidates in the reception to follow.

3. A closing comment

In surveying these Centuries of defeated Millennial aspiration I console myself with the reflection that if I had been watching the news that night with **John Bunyan, Benjamin Keatch, John Gill**, or **Andrew Fuller**, they could have made the same mistake too. Thank-you.

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UNIT 5: THOMAS HELWYS' WORK: HOW RELEVANT NOW?

A. INTRODUCTION

1A. The author of Unit 5

1. Doctor Brian Haymes welcomed

I would like to welcome this evening's lecturer, **Dr Brian Haymes**. When I told him that I was introducing him and would in all likelihood say something to embarrass him, he pointed out that he was speaking last and would have the final word. So I leave any rejoinder to his discretion. So I will keep it simple and short. I would like to express the gratitude of many, especially younger scholars, and express to **Dr. Haymes** our thanks for the encouragement that he has been to so many of us over the years. Also, he has set an example to us all, though most of us are not such, of what it means to be a Baptist scholar who is also a Baptist Pastor. It is personally a privilege for me to welcome him here to Regents' Park College. So I may now have embarrassed him, but I am very privileged to be able to have done so.

2. Doctor Brian Haymes introduced

Dr Brian Haymes has served in local Baptist Pastorates including Nottingham, Exeter, and Central London. He has been Principal of the Northern and Bristol Baptist Colleges, and served as the president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain in 1983. He has written extensively and widely in the areas of Baptist Thought, and his lecture, which is the fifth in our series, is entitled, '**Thomas Helwy's** *The Mystery of Iniquity: Is it still relevant in the Twenty First Century?*' Thank you.

2A. Orientation

1. Baptist Origins and the Reformation

The precise origins of the people called 'Baptists' are far from clear. There are loose ends galore, and it may be that the desired evidence is now impossible to come by. Baptists began in years heavy with disagreement, a feature of their existence with which they have remained consistent. But the disagreements were not initially or entirely of their making. They entered into arguments often set running by others. Thus it might be argued that Baptist roots are in the Reformation, that series of religious and political upheavals which shook Europe: Radical Reformation; Counter Reformation; and schism after schism. There was sometimes a brutality that accompanied these matters with many violent deaths. **Tripp York** puts it, 'Catholics killed Protestants, Protestants killed Catholics, and they both agreed to kill Anabaptists.' The victims' ecclesial body cried, 'Martyr!' whilst the inquisitor's ecclesial body cried, 'Criminal!'

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2. The Reformation: Origin of the Separatists

These were turbulent days involving among other factors disputes concerning the nature of the Christian Gospel itself, and the search for the purest Churches under heaven. Thus in England during the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I, there were serious religious controversies, persecutions and martyrdoms, political and religious power struggles, and the coming into being of small groups of Christians wishing to go further than the developing Puritanism, seeking a greater freedom for the ordering of their life and worship. Such congregations went by differing names, among which were 'Separatists'. Often at the heart of the group's lives were leaders who had been formed within the Church of the Monarch, through the ancient universities, but who found the new learning and reformed doctrine convincing and compelling.

B. BAPTIST BEGINNINGS

1B. The zeitgeist of the Baptist matrix

1. The Gainsborough Separatists: Smyth and Helwys and their context

Thus one **John Smyth**, a graduate of the University of Cambridge at a time when the Puritan influence was strong in that place, ordained priest of the Church of England, appointed lecturer by the City Council at Lincoln, came eventually to lead a small congregation of Separatists in Gainsborough, Lincolnshire. He had thought of going to Amsterdam, Netherlands, where there was a greater religious freedom than in England, not the least to consult with his former tutor **Francis Johnson** who had become a Pastor of an English Church in that city. The Gainsborough congregation included other clergymen. But one non-ordained member was to play a significant role in the story of Baptists. He was **Thomas Helwys**, squire of Brockstowe in the County of Nottinghamshire, England. He had studied Law as was common amongst the gentry of the time. Often there were others in that congregation. **Helwys** was not without financial resources, some local influences, and, as they say, 'had connections.'

2. Separatist raison d'être: The Ecclesiology of the (false) Establishment Church

Puritans and Separatists often engaged in heated disagreements. Puritans sought to remain in the developing Church by law established, Separatists increasingly saw that Church as a false Church. Contaminated from within by unconverted members, wrong notions of priesthood and of ministry, having an indebtedness to Rome in the shaping of its forms and its worship, and the fact that local members had no responsibility for the governance of the congregation other than obedience to the priest who was himself under religious and political orders. Separatists sought a congregational way of church government rejecting both Episcopal and Presbyterian forms.

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3. A Jacobite disappointment: James I further curtailed religious liberties

They shared a rising tide of hope with the coming of James I to the throne, but in the end, following the Hampton Court Conference of 1604 called by James, the curtailment of liberties for the separatists only increased. At such a time there were laws requiring attendance at the Parish Church, just one expression of the enforcement of religious uniformity on the nation's citizens. Such was the power of this imposition that it was during the days of James, significantly perhaps in 1612, that the last executions of heretics by burnings in England took place.

4. Regio eius Religio: Religious pluralism and Separatism traitorous

The issue of religious liberty was set squarely within the context of political loyalty. The doctrine of *regio eius religio*, the religion of the state followed that of the ruling house. It was assumed that the security of the state was incompatible with the forms of religious pluralism that Separatists sought. Hence, to refuse to conform was not simply a matter of expressing a religious opinion, it could be seen as traitorous. As different forms of the Church emerged: Catholic; Orthodox; Puritans; Separatists; Anabaptists; so there were competing claims to be the true Church, and some claimants, eager to engage the political and legal muscle of the State, to require conformity to their views.

2B. SMYTH, HELWYS and the first Baptist Church, 1609 in Amsterdam

1. SMYTH: The first Baptist Church in Munster's bakehouse, Amsterdam

Eventually in spite of the attempts by **John Smyth** and others to make the case for Separatism in England, the journey was made by some of the Gainsborough congregation to the Netherlands in order to practice the faith in freedom. It is likely that **Helwys** provided some of the finance needed for this venture. He left his wife and seven children, though one of them died very early indeed, hoping perhaps that they would join him later, or that his station in life would be their protection. However, in 1608 **Joan Ashmore Helwys** was before the courts for refusing to take an oath according to law, and she was imprisoned in York Castle. Meanwhile, **Smyth's** congregation in Amsterdam found a meeting place in the great bakehouse which was owned by **Jan Munster**, a Mennonite. The relocated congregation was not without its Theological disagreements. The contact with the Mennonites sharpened questions about the use of the sword by the authorities, leading **Helwys** and others to different understandings of the implications of saying that, 'Christ is Lord and Head of the Church.'

2. An emerging conviction: Baptism was only to be on profession of faith

It was while they were in Amsterdam that the little group became convinced that baptism was only to be administered on profession of repentance towards God and of

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faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. Such as were baptized were members of the true Church. This implied that Infant baptism was no-baptism, and that those who had been taken through this rite were still outside the Church of Christ. The small group of English people then set about reconstituting themselves as a Church by mutual covenant related to the baptism of professed believers. **Smyth** baptized himself, and then the others, including **Helwys**.

3. The 1st Baptist Church of 1609: Smyth doubts se-baptism becoming Mennonite

This is arguably the first Baptist Church, and is dated 1609. It was born in a context of disagreement with other Separatists, and was soon marred and marked by disagreements within. **Smyth** came to have doubts about his baptism at his own hands, believing that he should have sought baptism from the Mennonites. **Helwys** disagreed, and a group of about ten excommunicated **Smyth** who soon with the others sought membership with the Mennonites. **Smyth** died in 1612, and his group was eventually accepted by the Mennonites in 1615, so ceasing to be a Separate community.

C. HELWYS'S *A SHORT DECLARATION OF THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY*

1C. Introduction to *The Mystery of Iniquity*

1. England's First Baptist Church: Spitalfields 1699; and four books

Helwys needed to articulate his position and began to write, producing four books in two years. But he also had thoughts of home. He wrote about the, 'impossibility of witnessing to Christ in England,' from abroad. There is also a strong nationalistic bent to his writing as he reflected upon the culture of Europe in those days, although it has also been suggested that the return of the small congregation was in desperate search for new members. Whatever the reasons: **Helwys** and approximately ten others returned to England. If the first Baptist church was led by **Smyth** and was established in 1609 in Amsterdam, then the first Baptist Church in England was established in Spitalfields near London in 1611-1612, led by **Thomas Helwys** following the painful separation from **Smyth**.

2. Extant and printed editions of 'The mystery of Iniquity'

Among the writings **Helwys** brought with him was one entitled, *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*. The book was published, probably in Amsterdam, sometime in 1612. Of the first edition there are only five known surviving copies – in Doctor William's Library, University of London; in Trinity College, University of Dublin; in the Balton Library in Cashaul Cathedral, County Tipperary; in the Bodleian Library here in Oxford; and in the Angus Library at Regents' Park (Baptist) College, Oxford. The Baptist Historical Society published a fascimilie edition in 1935 edited by **Henry Wheeler-Robinson**, and a more recent edition was published in 1998 edited and

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introduced by **Richard Groves**. The most recent is edited by **Joe Earley** and was published along with other of **Helwy's** writings in 2009.

3. A literary critical perspective

It cannot be claimed that the *A short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity* is a notable Theological or literary work. **Wheeler-Robinson's** judgment was that, 'None could call it literature in the high sense of **Milton's** classic definition.' We certainly cannot claim for **Thomas Helwys** that he was a master spirit of this realm, or that his style embalms his thought with literary grace. **Groves** gathers a number of similar judgments suggesting that the work is as it is because the author was over-wrought, meant well as a man of good natured parts, but lacked the advantage of learned education.

4. James VI of Scotland as James I of England is its addressee

What is notable is that the book is at times directly addressed to the Monarch. There is boldness in the text as the author calls the king to his responsibilities before God. In fact, the copy in the Bodleian Library is remarkable for a personal note found inside the front cover indicating that it was **Helwy's** clear intention that the book be read by **James I**. That note in **Helwy's** own hand reads, 'Hear, O king, and despise not the counsel of the poor, and let their complaints come before thee. The king is a mortal man and not God and he therefore has no power over the immortal souls of his subjects to make laws and ordinances for them, and to set Spiritual Laws over them. If the king ash authority to make Spiritual law and laws then he is an immortal god and not a mortal man. O king, be not seduced by deceivers to sin against God whom you ought to obey, nor against your poor subjects who ought and will obey you in all things with body, lives, and goods; or else let their lives be taken from the earth. God save the king!' **Helwys** added his signature.

5. HELWYS imprisoned in Newgate goal, London in 1612

It may well have been that **Helwys** hoped that his social standing might give him access to the king. In the event we do not know whether **James** received the book, let alone read it. We can be sure, however, that he would not have welcomed its direct boldness. Tradition has it that the next we know of **Helwys** is that he was imprisoned in Newgate Goal in 1612. But we do not know the charge laid against him, nor what became of him. But we do know that by 1616 his wife was described as a widow, and there is some evidence that has come to light that suggests that he was still alive in 1614. *A short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*, however, must have had some part in sealing his fate.

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2C. Book 1 of *The Mystery of Iniquity*

1. Four parts (or 'books') that are Biblical, polemical, and apocalyptic

So what is this book about? It is in four parts. The style is constantly polemical, with occasional sarcasm as targets are identified and vigorously attacked. It reflects the apocalyptic interests of the time, and quotes the Bible in ways that surprise and discomfort most contemporary readers. Its Theology might not be of the highest quality, but it is undoubtedly passionate. These were days, of course, when people were prepared to kill and be killed for such matters.

2. Romish profession: The first beast of *Revelation* & iniquity's highest expression

In the first part of the book **Helwys** attacks both the Roman Church and the hierarchy of the Church of England. The Roman Church is identified as the first beast of the *Book of Revelation* whose chief sin in **Helwys'** eyes is the binding of men's consciences not least by taking from the people the word of God which they interpret with 'imaginary expositions'. So if there can be a Church of Christ where the Spirit of the Lord's Mouth is not, and there His brightness shines not, in such a Church the man of sin may sit and rule as God. Drawing mainly on the *Book of Revelation*, he asks those of the Romish profession, either to deny that the prophecies are true, or to yield to the claim that they are fulfilled in the present state of the Church. **Helwys** is concerned in particular with the pomp and power of the hierarchy, their use of titles, their assumed control of the means of Grace and Salvation, and the making of Spiritual Laws and decrees to bind people's consciences. The mystery of iniquity and the abomination of desolation is exalted to the highest in the Romish profession. Not a welcome guest at an ecumenical meal!

3. The second beast: The Episcopal hierarchy of the Church of England

For the second beast **Helwys** looks no further than the hierarchy of archbishops and Lord Bishops of the emerging Church of England. They too call on men and women to submit to their rule. He refers to what he calls the 'Commone Booke' and asks, 'By what power do you make prayers and bind men to them and appoint the order of them in time and place whereof two you appoint to be read every evening without alteration, some prayers to be said after the curate be paid his due, some to the North side of the table, some in one place, some in another. This same hierarchy,' claims **Helwys**, 'takes and uses the power of excommunication which the rich can settle by donations, but it leaves the poor to be cast into prison. 'Is this taught by the Lamb or any of the Apostles?' asks **Helwys**. And so on. As the power and privileges of the bishops, their use of names and titles which belong only to God, their making of Spiritual laws and above all, the attempt to bind consciences in matters of religion, are seriously questioned.

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4. The king should confiscate episcopal palaces and possessions

Perhaps, more remarkably, **Helwys** suggests that the king confiscate episcopal palaces and possessions, and require the Church and its leaders henceforth to live on the free gifts of the people. ‘O that we might live to see all them that preach the Gospel to live off the Gospel, that is, off the free liberality of the saints.’

3C. Books 3 and 4 of the *Mystery of Iniquity*

1. Book 3: Puritans should separate themselves from the Church of England

Books three and four focus some further criticisms by **Helwys** and allow him to give expression to his developing Believers’ Church emphasis. Book Three claims that although there are criticisms of the Church of England within the forms of Puritanism, the fact is that Puritans do not separate themselves enough from the life of the second beast. ‘they seek appointments in this Church claiming that by so doing they are promoting the peace of the Church, when really it is their own security that is their concern.’ **Helwys** contrasts his developing understanding of the government of the Church with that of Presbyterianism and Episcopalianism, in particular the calling of a pastor in the early Church was, he claims, the responsibility of the local congregation, and not that of monarch, bishop, or patron. ‘No money was exchanged,’ he said, ‘as a holy people sought from a Holy God the holy pastor.’ His sarcasm is again employed as he contrasts the appointment of curate and pastors, ‘who by suit and service, by riding and running, by attending and waiting, by capping and curtseying, and at last by prostrating yourself on your knees at the feet of an archbishop or lord bishop receive your ordination from him who herein exalts himself above God. Such a rebellious hierarchy is at enmity with God,’ and in this way, **Helwys** argues, Puritans allow themselves to be vulnerable to government by a foreign power, and not Christ. ‘It is not only a matter of the faithful preaching of the true word, or the right administration of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, it is also the issue of right governance of the Church,’ argues **Helwys**. ‘Christ is given the title of king, but not the power to rule in the Church, but in their submission to the lord bishop the Puritans take from Christ the power and government of a king.’ For **Helwys** the binding of people’s consciences by any means including oaths of loyalty to the bishops and archbishops is the most grievous issue. By such means Christ’s claim to rule his Church is relativized, and the Church, the Body of Christ, is corrupted.

2. Book 4: Separatists must embrace a correct doctrine of baptism

In Book Four **Helwys** turns to those Puritans who have become Separatists. For such Separatists, ‘The Church was constituted by those believers called and gathered by God who had willingly entered into Covenant.’ **Helwys** once had sympathy with such a view but here he takes it to task as he develops his arguments concerning baptism, and therefore membership in the true Church. He is blunt in his critique of **John Robinson’s** view of baptism which argued that the essential causes included water and

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washing in the Name of the Trinity. **Helwys** retorted that baptism involves water, and the Holy Spirit which implies being purified from an evil conscience as well as being washed in water. **Robinson** further argued that a lawful person should administer baptism, being one of the pertinences in which baptism is clothed. **Helwys** retorted that, 'the Holy Spirit, a lawful minister, a right party to be baptized, and a faithful congregation of the baptized are no mere pertinences but the essentials of baptism.' **Robinson's** view allowed for Infant Baptism, **Helwys's** did not. He wrote of, 'the true baptism of Christ which is the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, and be therewith baptized and put on Christ, and not satisfying yourselves with childish baptism in which baptism they have not nor could not put on Christ, but without which baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, they cannot put on Christ.'

3. Exchange the safety of the Netherlands for essential persecution in England

Helwys further criticized the Separatists for remaining in the comparative safety of the Netherlands, citing the *Acts of the Apostles*, the Epistles, and *the Book of Revelation* as evidence of the need to endure suffering and persecution in the true cause of Christ. This is **Helwys's** stated reason for returning to his home country. As far as he was concerned, as we have seen, it is not possible to witness to Christ in England, from a foreign land. He recalls Christ's words about shaking off the dust of towns that do not receive the word or its messengers, and asks, 'When will the Separatists shake the dust off their feet as a witness against Amsterdam or Leiden, which cities receive them not nor the word they bring. Otherwise they receive Turks and Jews and all sorts who come only to seek safety and profit.'

4C. Book Two of *A short declaration of the mystery of iniquity*

1. Congregational not monarchical determination of the faith of the people

So we have come to Book Two at the last because it is here that we find the quotations that have become the famous and best known parts of the book, at least amongst some Baptists. We ought to recall the context. It includes the common assumption that the monarch and government determined the religion and faith of the people of the nation. **Helwys** has been out over some very deep water, as he has argued for a congregational understanding of Church governance. The established powers shaping the nations' identity and loyalty would not have welcomed **Helwys's** case. Book Two draws out the social and religious implications of his argument in such a way that it is hard to see how *A short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity* could be ignored at its publication. If James did ever read it he would have recognized it as a dangerous tract. It is in Book Two that **Helwys** states and develops his argument for an universal liberty of conscience in matters of religion. It must have required some courage to present this case so publicly, his address being in this part so directly to the king.

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2. Liberty of conscience in religion: The king but an earthly temporal authority

Helwys believes he can do this because it is his conviction that the King's throne is established by God's Justice. He accepts, indeed argues, for the due right of lawful monarchs to reign: 'God has given power and authority to the monarch which all the king's subjects should acknowledge, respect, and obey. The king has the power to make laws and ordinances and see that they are enforced. Indeed, God has given to the king all worldly power which extends to the goods and bodies of his servants.' Following, he believes, **Saint Paul** in *Romans* 13, **Helwys** believes that the state is divinely ordained, and that the king is called to be zealous for the Glory of God and in particular by resisting any friendship with the beast all monarchs show that they are true lovers of the Lamb. Certainly the king should not give up his God given power to the influence of the beast: 'Let the king reign!' is a key affirmation of **Helwys's** argument. But, and it is a crucial 'but,' 'God has reserved to Himself a heavenly kingdom not of this world. It is a kingdom in which the monarch with all of his people is properly subject, for in this Kingdom Christ alone is head. Christ is head and king only, only High Priest and Bishop and there is no other king, no primate, metropolitan, archbishop, or Lord Spiritual but Christ only, nor maybe either in name or power to exercise authority one over another. Within this kingdom Christ alone has power of appointment and Caesar must not attempt to take what belongs to God. Should the earthly king seek so to do, then he takes authority to sit not only on the throne God has given him in the nation, but on David's throne.' **Helwys** points out the distress which would come if every king would take that power, citing the example of Spain, one senses rather cheekily at this moment, 'where all in the Spanish dominions are compelled to serve God as the king commands, declaring all by the power of the sword to be papists, and any that resist to be seen as evil-doers. Such an outcome would be based on the false belief that the monarch through the state has rights and powers over human consciences. But an earthly sword is ordained only for earthly power. The Spiritual sword is needed for a Spiritual Kingdom and only Christ sits upon David's throne to order that Spiritual Kingdom.' 'A monarch must recognize this,' says **Helwys**, 'it is Spiritual obedience that the Lord requires, and the king's sword cannot smite the spirits of men. And if our lord the king shall force and compel men to worship and keep the Lord's Supper against their consciences, so shall he make his poor subjects to worship and eat unworthily whereby he shall compel them to sin against God and increase their own judgment.' Crucial matters for **Helwys** are the Sovereign right of Christ the King, and the consequent holy nature of the human conscience before God. 'The King must exercise no cruel tyranny over consciences, nor allow any others to do the same. For religion should be a freely chosen matter, since all will stand before the Judgement seat of God. Christ Himself did not force human consciences. He did not condemn the Samaritans who refused Him nor did He dismiss the people of Gadara when they pleaded with Him to leave. No sword of Justice is at all required or committed to smite any person refusing Christ,' says **Helwys**. 'Indeed, the earthly monarch has the responsibility to see that such a sword would not be used on his earthly subjects.'

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3. HELWYS's prayer for the king

Helwys summarizes this part of his argument: ‘Then let our lord the king in all happiness and prosperity sit in his own princely throne of that mighty kingdom of Great Britain which God has given to the king at his posterity, may the Lord give the king a wise heart to rule and judge his people, and the Lord give His people faithful hearts to love and obey him, and let all those the king’s enemies that would not that he should reign over them be slain before him and let our Lord Jesus Christ in power and majesty sit upon David’s throne, the throne of the Kingdom of Israel which His Father has given to Him, and let Christ according to His own wisdom judge His people Israel, and let our Lord the king be His subject to which our lord the king yielding himself to be, the king must needs grant that as he is an earthly king he can have no power to rule in this Spiritual Kingdom of Christ nor can compel any to be subjects thereof as a king while the king is but a subject himself. For there may be but one king in Israel.’

4. Follow Henry VIII's example: free the people from the second beast

On such a basis **Helwys** goes on in particular to question the practice of the king of appointing Spiritual lords over the House of God, and of various systems ‘that the ways and words of worship be prescribed, and that in the tongue not of the people.’ Citing what he takes to be the good example of King Henry VIII who freed the people from the bondage of the first beast, **Helwys** hopes that James will do the same with the excesses of this rising second beast who keep the people in such cruel bondage and insist that only the bishops have the true interpretation of the word, and that they determine how God is to be worshipped with appointed prayers. **Helwys** pleads with the king to ‘affirm for the people that blessed liberty to read and hear the word of God in their own language, and to pray in their public worship in their own tongue. Anything less represents an assumed power to rule over human consciences in the greatest things between God and Humanity. Let the king be satisfied with the power God has given him, and resist any who would deny liberty of conscience to his subject.’ Citing Scriptural examples **Helwys** claims that ‘neither Christ nor his apostles commanded a way of worship.’ ‘The king should take any sword of compulsion out of the bishops’ hands. If they are to remain in office, let them be tested by the application of the word of God to their lives and doctrine. If the king would search the Scriptures he would see that there is no warrant for the monarch to elect bishops anyway. Let the king restore that power of Christ to the Church, to the election and ordination of bishops and deacons, according to the rule of the Holy Ghost.’

5. HELWYS on the Church of England Bishops

It is in this context of a plea about false shepherds of the flock of Christ those who take the king’s sword into their own hands preferring their own kingdom before Christ’s, that we come to the most famous quotation. Let me begin it a little earlier than is usual. ‘But these lord bishops cannot in any wise enter with the pure ones that do faithfully seek for reformation, because such are only adversaries to their kingdom. We still pray

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our lord the king that we may be free from suspect for any thoughts of provoking evil against them of the Romish religion in regard to their profession if they are true and faithful subjects to the king. For we do freely profess that our lord the king has no more power over their consciences than over ours. And that is none at all. For our lord the king is but an earthly king, and he has no authority as a king but in earthly courses. And if the king's people be obedient and true subjects obeying all human laws made by the king, our lord the king can require no more. For men's religion to God is between God and themselves. The king shall not answer for it, neither may the king be judged between God and Man. Let them be hereticks, Turks, Jews, or whatsoever; it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure.'

6. Faith can never be extrapolated by force

Helwys presses his argument, especially with regard to any possible force being applied to citizens to believe the lord bishops any more than they be forced to believe the way the small Baptist groups are reading Scripture. 'Who shall decide between different readings of Scripture?' **Helwys's** position rather optimistically is that the teaching Christ and His apostles gave in the New Testament is surely the test for bishops and Baptists. 'That same New Testament includes evidence of persecution of the Church by worldly governors, although admittedly, they were heathen.' **Helwys** appeals to the Christian king to respond differently. 'Let Christians work for the conversion of the enemies of Christ and not their destruction.' **Helwys** prays that the king may resist any temptation to take power over the Church of Christ. Optimistically in the light of history **Helwys** prays that 'the king and his sons to God's glory may sit upon the throne of Great Britain while the earth endures. But to teach and profess a differing judgement in religion to the state cannot be seditious.'

7. A conclusion to Book Two concerning the but temporal authority of the king

Book Two concludes: 'And it may please our lord the king and all that are in authority and government under the king with their wise judgement to consider that it may be a strange thing to condemn men for sedition who profess and teach that in all earthly things the king's power is to be submitted unto; and in heavenly or spiritual things if the king or any in authority under him shall exercise their power against any, they are not to resist by any way or means, although it were in their power, but rather submit to give their lives as Christ and His disciples did, and yet keep their consciences to God and they that teach any other doctrine let them be accursed.'

8. Caesar receives what is due to Caesar, not what is due to God

Well: The text shows something of the caution of **Helwys**. He believed that the lawful government must be obeyed. In his time the government is focused in the king whom **Helwys** believed to be Divinely appointed. 'Caesar must receive what is due to Caesar. But if the king demands loyalty from his subjects in matters Spiritual or who appoints archbishops and bishops who make laws for their Spiritual discipline, then the king

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goes too far, and Caesar has asked for what belongs to God alone.’ **Helwys** seems to advocate a form of the Lutheran ‘Two kingdoms’ doctrine; the two ways by which God rules the world: By His word, for that is all which God’s faithful people need; but also by the power of lawful government to keep sin within bounds by co-ercion of force if necessary. Both of these are works of God, but they are not the same, and to confuse the two such that the king takes it upon himself to order the Church of God and the faith of the people is serious error.’ But is there also here, I wonder, a hint of the more Calvinist conviction about all things being under the Sovereign Rule of Christ?

D. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF THE ‘MYSTERY OF INIQUITY’

1D. Introduction

1. Issues raised by *The Mystery of Iniquity*

Well: Those learned scholars, the Fellows of the Centre of Baptist History and Heritage and the Oxford Centre for Christianity and Culture at Regents’ Park College asked me in their invitation to consider the relevant of *The Mystery of Iniquity* nearly four hundred years after its first appearance. They neglected to be specific with this slippery term. ‘Relevant’ to whom, or to what? Whether it fits with their wishes or not, there are a number of issues which **Helwys** touches on in his book, issues which to my mind are still of concern. Among them are the believers’ Church tradition; the appointment of ministers; issues of power, authority, and the governance of the Church; and the questions of the relations of the State and the Church of Christ and, in particular, issues of religious liberty. The remainder of this lecture is going to touch briefly on some of these topics.

2. The convictions of those in the earliest Baptist covenant

Thomas Helwys is significant for Church history in leading with others the first Baptist Church on English soil. He put in writing some early Baptist convictions and was in covenant with those who tried to live out these convictions. They had come to understand, following their study of the Scriptures, that the members of Christ’s Church were those who had heard the Good News of the Gracious God, the one made known in Jesus, and turning from their old ways had by the Spirit freely come to believe and trust the Tri-une God of the new Covenant. In mercy, God has sought and found the lost. In Christ the work of reconciliation was complete, and several times **Helwys** points out that there have been no attempts to bribe, co-erce, threaten, or cajole compliance. God’s covenant was one of calling and invitation and was entered into by Grace through trust and faith. Those who were members of the Church were disciples who have freely responded to God’s call. They were believers, they are believers. This has always been a feature of an authentic Baptist understanding of God and of the Church as God’s gathering of those whom He has called in Christ through the Spirit. **Helwys** is significant as being amongst the first to take this so seriously; that the Church be shared

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and sought, and that he who shared and sought found expression in ‘Believer’s Baptism.’

2D. Specific Issues

1. Baptism and Church membership

Baptism, and the consequent understanding of the Church, was to be an important issue for Baptists. Not that they have ever had one single mind on tis Theology and practice. At their best Baptists have continued to affirm this Theological understanding of the Church; beginning in the gracious call of God; and leading to the corporate life in Christ. They turn from what had become the accepted practice of Infant Baptism believing that ‘Reformation of the Church needed to pay the closest attention to Scripture.’ There they read of the Gracious Calling God, forming His people by Grace, Mercy, and Faithfulness, and in discipleship in covenant love. **Helwys** would have approved of **David Wright’s** assessment that the slow, later emergence of infant baptism after the New Testament under later Augustinian influence led to a massive change in the history of Christ’s Church. As **Wright** says, ‘From being a company recruited by intentional response, the Gospel imperative to discipleship and baptism; it became a body enrolled from birth. It was arguably one of the greatest sea-changes in the history of Christianity. It led to the formation of Christendom comprising the Christian empire, and Christian nations or people. Christianity became a matter of hereditary, not decision.’ In so far as the Church permitted people to believe that being a Christian was to be born and baptized in a Christian state, then no one would ever feel the need to be challenged to become a Christian, for every respectable citizen counted as a Christian. Whether we are coming to the end of Christendom in Great Britain or not, the contemporary Church faces questions about her life and membership. There is something odd to my mind in the recognition that millions of our citizens are baptized members of a Church whose life they rarely share in worship, and whose teachings scarcely touch their lives. **Helwys’s** call for a new and regenerate church needs a new and urgent hearing.

2. Appointment of ministers

In establishment Christendom forms of the Church the state has an interest in those appointed in the Church. Oaths of loyalty are sworn as Church and State are in partnerships of power. **Helwys** thought it a scandal that such important offices in the Body of Christ were in the gift of the monarch and might therefore risk an involvement in all the corruption that goes with such patronage. In the New Testament he read of Christ the only Head of the Church, His body, appointing apostles and ministers; and later of the Church in its various congregations seeking under Christ and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit to discern those whom now God was calling and giving to the Church to keep it faithful to the Lord and building the members up in ministry. This was not an issue of democracy, each member voting for their candidate, but a more urgent calling on God, seeking together for the Divine Will. With the gift of the

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appointment in the hands of the monarch, or parliament, other parties and interests had an influence. But that was not proper to the Body of Christ. **Helwys** sought a distinction in these matters between Church and State, He was, I think, only just beginning to work at the nature of that relationship.

3. **HELWYS: The king of divine right must support and defend the true Church**

But: Is the distinction so clear cut as **Helwys** suggests? On matters of Church appointments Baptists still find it extraordinary that the State confirms senior appointments in the Church of England, sometimes called, 'The National Church,' another concept which puzzles and disturbs Baptists. There is evidence that **Helwys** was a nationalist and that he believed that **James I** ruled by Divine Right. His culture was one where the religion of the prince was the religion of the prince's people. **Helwys** was clearly challenging that assumption. But just how far he realized what he was saying is not clear. He looked for the state in the person of the king to support the true Church in its work. He allowed, unlike **John Smyth**, that Church members could with good conscience hold office as magistrates, servants of the state, wielding the sword. But we cannot be sure just how far he would have gone on the question of the separation of Church and State. He did, however, sow seeds capable of potent growth. In recent years we have witnessed in other parts of the world some Baptist groups seeking power of influence in the State to shape in their eyes a more Christian nation by law. Is that ever possible? Or even desirable?

4. **The United Kingdom a Christian nation?**

Discussions in the United Kingdom about citizenship and identity have sometimes led to appeals to the historic links between Church and State claiming that Great Britain has been a Christian country, indeed, is a Christian country. We still have a State church by Law established and there is no doubt that the Christian influences have been stronger than any other religion in our national history. But none of that makes for a Christian nation.

3D. **Reflections on HELWYS's questioning the assumptions of the day**

1. **The Church should appoint her own ministers but also engage with the state**

Helwys had set out on an adventurous journey questioning the assumptions of his day. He was quite clear that the Church should appoint its ministers. It was no part of the monarch's or the state's responsibility or privilege to rule in the Church, a separation with which Baptists would agree. But might citizens look to the state for a defense against persecution of their religious beliefs, even the freedom to propagate their beliefs? What role, if any, does the Church have in shaping the life of the nation? And if it does have such a responsibility, is that to be discharged by seeking power and influence, or by being a witness in its own life to an alternative politics under the rule of Christ? Such a reflection can lead to the charge of sectarianism. But what if the

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stance of separation is not one of social withdrawal, but a crucial form of involvement and engagement with the state? Might not separation from the surrounding social consensus be a tactic for making and keeping the Church faithful to Jesus Christ for the sake of the neighbors.

2. Ministers and clergy are a gift from God: ‘My lord’ etc. is not appropriate

Helwys was not himself ordained, but he believed that God made gifts of ministers to the Church, and that those so recognized have serious responsibilities laid upon them, the first being to follow Christ. **Helwys** abhorred the way these men always men took titles to themselves such as ‘Your grace,’ or ‘My lord,’ titles he believed belonged to God alone. Moreover, they lived in palaces, and received by demand the gifts of the people, sometimes amassing fortunes for themselves. This for **Helwys** was a long way from the apostolic examples of ministry. He advocated the confiscation of such wealth by the king, but his real concern about the ministry that he experienced in the Church of his day was its assumption that it could rule over people’s consciences in matters of faith and practice. **Helwys** argued that no monarch, no parliament, no pope, no bishop or Baptist pastor could do such a thing and take an authority which was Christ’s alone. Discerning that rule was a matter between God and the whole company of those Christians in covenant community in the Church.

3. People must choose their religion for themselves

It is his insistence upon universal religious freedom of conscience that is in many ways the most remarkable feature of the *Mystery of Iniquity*. ‘O let the king judge! Is it not most equal that men should choose their religion themselves, seeing they only must themselves stand before the Judgement Seat of God to answer for themselves when it shall be no excuse for them to say, ‘We were commanded or compelled to be of this religion by the king or by them that had authority from him.

4D. A Final Analysis

1. A Theological ‘declaration of human rights’?

It is not easy for us to grasp the radical and challenging nature of this question. It seems such an obvious point to our generation enshrined as it is in the ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights,’ even if it is not universally practiced as some European Baptists amongst others could presently testify. It is crucial, I believe, to note that **Helwys**’s argument here was strictly Theological. It is not an appeal to human rights. It is because God is as God is in Jesus, that he believed that we human beings have freedom of conscience in such matters. It is the sovereignty of the non-compelling covenant seeking God that guarantees the religious and political freedom of the people. No king may take what God has given. Thus the freedom of conscience of all, be they Turks, hereticks, Jews, or whatsoever is grounded for **Helwys** in the nature of the Tri-une God.

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2. The monarch as a Christian is subject to Christ

This Theological approach stands in contrast to arguments about ‘rights.’ Issues of toleration steadily became important in Europe, not the least, so it is argued, because of the violence that religion as alleged to have provoked even to the extent of wars of religion. Tolerance became a desire of those who had seen too much bloodshed in the various names of God. We have had that desire stirred again within us in recent years, for we have witnessed horrific allegedly based religious killings in our time. There were always those, and the Mennonite contacts of **Smyth** and **Helwys** were among them, who refused to share in the persecution of those who differed from them, but by holding this view they became both a political and a Theological scandal. But, like **Helwys**, they were trying to work out just what it meant that ‘Jesus Christ is Lord’. How did the rule of Jesus Christ relate to those legitimate demands of the state? As we have seen, **Helwys** argued that the king *had* the right to due obedience in matters of citizenship, but he’d argue that the monarch as a true Christian was subject to Christ. Increasingly we have seen the secular state regulate the lives of citizens, while those who actively confess a religious faith have become a minority in the United Kingdom.

3. Toleration and the state as soteriology of national peace

We have also come to experience a greater religious diversity than we have recognized before on these islands. The nation-state has, it might be claimed, in various ways attempted to safeguard its citizens from forms of religious oppression and disagreeable divisions it brings. **William T.Cavenor** argues that the state has in fact become an alternative soteriology to that of the Church when it comes to keeping the eternal peace of the nation. The principal of the toleration of all religions is a dominant state doctrine, especially when religion is reduced to the individual life, or to matters of inward spirituality. The state looks to intervene, defending its members against any threatening religious imposition of particular beliefs and practices by law, This is the corporate life of the secular social contract. But that is not the same as covenant relationships of gift and mutual trust such as we find in the Christian story. To be free in our modern society often looks like being free from other people and their claims upon us.

4. God’s covenant is shared participation

God’s covenant is by contrast to a shared participation. As **George Stroop** argues: ‘Such a community, that is the nation state, is contractual and not covenantal because it is forged on an exclusively human agreement unmediated by the claim that all who are party to it are bound to one another because they first live before God, and are accountable to one another because they are finally accountable not just to themselves, not even to one another, but to God. One could argue that the major issues before communities in the Twenty First Century is whether social contracts based solely on maximizing one’s own self-interest are strong enough to bind together increasingly diverse and ethnic groups.

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5. The state controls people, the Church holds it accountable before God

Again by contrast with the state which is inevitably concerned with national interests, the Church has a trans-national nature. The state looks in varying degrees to control its citizens, whereas the Church, without ambitions to territorial power, does not seek such control. But the Church does seek to hold the state to account before God which means it may well express its life in dissent from the policies of the state. But it may also positively affirm those policies, dissent serves more than just a negative critical function. **Helwys** would, I think, have been wary of the notion of the Church as a people in exile, but he would have understood the calling of the Church to be a different people because the members ultimately serve a different Lord, who is the Lord of all.

6. The peace of the city sought by sojourners in a strange land

Christians seek the peace of the city, but not by assuming that the city is their one and only home. Moreover, they will find sisters and brothers in other cities of the world living under different emperors and sharing the one body of Christ that may well enter into their joys and sorrows, encouraging one another to keep the faith, to witness to a greater kingdom, whatever the policy of their own national government. To be God's Church may be at times like feeling as foreigners in a strange land, but there is no denying the call to seek the well-being, the common good of all the citizens.

5D. Two closing calls

1. Issues confronting the church of England

Here are issues which certainly confront the Church of England. We urgently need more work at unashamedly political Theologies. British Baptists in particular need to heed those theologians who call us to re-consider deeper understandings of practices of worship, especially the meaning of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, those liturgical practices which shape our common identity in Christ and save us from forms of pietistic individualism not unknown among us now. Worship unaware of its political dimensions easily plays into the hands of irrelevant escapism. Again the issue is Theological and not about how large a number we can attract. **Helwys's** early attempts at distinctions of forms of political and religious authority still have value, not least in the Christian Community in the land. He reminds us that these issues are essentially Theological: that is, they have to do with God, and God's calling in Christ.

2. Freedom: The true Church a people of radical gratitude

Freedom is never something manufactured by the state and authorized within the limits of its controlling contractual laws, but rather is a gift that originates in the Grace of God who will not oppress or co-erce anyone, but who calls all His children to trust his word and ways, and find their freedom as the gift it can only ever be. Thus the True Church is a people of radical gratitude and trust committed to each other and to the world, as is

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the Tri-une God. Christians normally will live as loyal citizens of the state, but with the trans-national commitment to the God whose will it is that all people, all creation be set free and complete in Christ. For this reason **Helwys** also understood that the Church is missionary, apostolic in nature and calling. This is not a matter of proselytizing as if its own formation was some kind of achievement or goal, but rather one vital feature of sharing in the costly mission of the Tri-une God, source of all human freedom, and hope of the world's salvation.

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UNIT 6: SECT & CHURCH: A CRITICAL DIALECTIC

A. INTRODUCTION

1A. Introduction to Unit 5 and its tutor Professor Paul Fiddes D.D.(Oxon.)

1. Introduction to Unit 5

Good evening friends! I think that we will make a beginning, at least with the usual announcements. We're delighted to welcome you again to Regents' Park College, University of Oxford, and to this series of units that is being sponsored jointly by the University of Oxford Centre for Christianity and Culture and the Centre for Baptist History and Heritage. This unit is the final unit in this particular series, but we are already looking forward to the next course in this series, and that is on the theme of 'On being Human.' (C.f.: ICPICCJC M.A./M.Th. Course 'On Being Human' for further details.) This will be a Theological and Bio-Medical multi-disciplinary series reflecting on 'What it means to be Human.' (The course is available in the ICPICCJC M.A./M.Th. program.) If you would like to be in a regular contact with us and you are not so already by e-mail, do sign up on the contact list which is at the back of this lecture room, and we will keep you abreast with any regular news and any last minute alterations to the program that there may be. There are also copies of the newsletter available at the back of the room. I am also told that this is the last week that the bookstall is going to be with us, and so if you want to take advantage of the bargains that are there, particularly the paternoster ones where there is a thirty percent discount, this is your last chance. So make the most of that before you go.

2. Introduction to Unit 5. 's author: Professor Paul Fiddes

It is my great pleasure to introduce our course tutor for this unit, my friend and colleague **Professor Paul Fiddes**. It is often said on these occasions that a person who needs little introduction because so many of you know him, doesn't need a lengthy one. But there are those of you here who don't know him, and so I am going to say a word or two. Most of you will know of **Professor Paul Fiddes** on account of his long service in the University of Oxford. Until two years ago he was the Principal of Regents' Park College, University of Oxford, and has stayed on as Director of Research where he co-ordinates the co-operative and collective research of the scholars and research fellows here in Regents' Park College. His interests are wide ranging, but as he bears the title **Professor Systematic Theology** within the University of Oxford, its no surprise to know that he is best known and regarded for his work in that field, particularly in cross disciplinary ventures into the fields of Theology and Literature; and he is co-convening a major conference on Theology and Literature in August 2010 as these units are being edited. He has also written and contributed widely to Baptist reflections, particularly on ecclesiology, he has been part of Anglo-Baptist conversations for a good many years, and contributed to a number of publications in that area and is currently a part of the

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Baptist board that has conversations with the Roman Catholic Church. Some of us are delighted to see a rather splendid picture of **Professor Fiddes** lecturing **Pope Benedict XVI** a year or two ago. So it is tonight that he brings us his reflections on ‘Church and Sect’. He has slightly tweaked the title, so I am going to let him introduce the tweaked version to you now. Thank-you.

2A. Profesor Paul Fiddes introduces Unit 5

1. The Revised title

Thank you very much indeed for your introduction. My revised title is ‘*Church and Sect: Cross-Currents in Early Baptist Life*.’ The distinction between Church and Sect has been an unpopular way of describing the social forms of Church during the last century. Among religious writers in the United Kingdom and in Europe the label ‘sect’ has been a way of designating those ecclesial communities, Baptists among them, which are not part of the established Church and who are therefore adjudged to have cut themselves off from the so-called mainstream of religious life in a nation. Whilst Ecumenical partners will hasten to insist that the word ‘sect’ carries no Theological implications of heresy whatsoever, it is merely a sociological definition; it is sometimes use to support the views that Baptists are one of those religious communities whose main concern is pastoral care for their own members rather than ministry to society as a whole.

2. The aim and purpose of Unit 5

Ironically, as we shall see, sociologists have been much more hesitant than Theologians to classify Baptists of the present day as a sect, and have generally denied that the label is either a suitable or a helpful one. Why this should be so I want to explore in this paper. Coming at the end of a series on ‘Baptist Origins’ I also want to review once again the earliest story of the Baptists to see whether there is any basis there for either employing or doubting this classification.

B. CHURCH AND SECT DEFINED

1B. MAX WEBER: ‘Church’ and ‘Sect’

1. MAX WEBER: ‘Churches and Sects in North America’ and the Baptists

The difference between a Church and a Sect appears to have been made first by the sociologist **Max Weber** in an article published in 1906 entitled ‘*Churches and Sects in North America*’. His key example of what he names a ‘sect’ is the Baptist community! He offers this amusing anecdote. ‘On a cold Sunday morning in October I attended a Baptist Baptism in the forelands of Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina, United States of America. Approximately ten people of both sexes in their Sunday best entered

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the icy water of Mountain Stream one after another, and after voluminous declarations of allegiance bent their knees back into the arms of a black-clothed Reverend who stood waist deep in the water during the entire procedure, until their faces disappeared under the water, climbed out sneezing and shivering, were congratulated by the farmers who'd come in large numbers by horse and wagon, and quickly made for home. 'Faith protects one from catching cold,' the saying goes. One of my cousins who had escorted me from his farm and who scorned the procedure by spitting irreverently showed a certain interest as an intelligent looking young man submerged himself. 'O, see, Mister X, I told you so!' Just to explain he responded only that Mister X intended only to open a bank in Mount Airey and needed significant credit!

2. WEBER: The difference between 'Church' and Sect'

Now, I'll return shortly to the use of this tantalizing word 'credit,' but first we should notice that **Weber** is using the word 'sect' in a limited way. The difference he highlights between 'sect' and 'church' is that a church sees itself as an institution, 'a kind of Divinely endowed foundation,' he says, 'for the Salvation of those who are born into it and who are thus Spiritually bound to its offices.' Conversely, 'a sect,' he claims, 'is a varied voluntary community of individuals composed purely on the basis of their religious qualification. The individuals admitted by virtue of a voluntary resolution by both that person and the existing members of the group.' Reduced to its essentials one is born into a Church but voluntarily joins a sect, according to **Weber**. 'Connected with the voluntary agreement binding the community together, is the acceptance of a strict ethical life so that a member expresses and proves his or her religious qualification to be a part of the group through practical conduct, while a Church,' he says, 'is content to have a mixture of saints and sinners amongst its members aiming at comprehensiveness and universality, a sect insists on purity.' This is what **Weber** calls a 'movement of ascetic Protestantism'. Every member of the community is expected to aim for an ascetic ideal, that is, a rigorous self-discipline cultivated by prayer and Regular Bible Reading, where in a Church that Spiritual ideal is prescribed only for special classes such as priests, monks, and nuns.

3. The initial example extended

So we return to the comment about the credit of the young man who was found plunging into the ice cold waters of the mountain stream. By joining the Baptist sect which is known for its strict moral code of behaviour the customers and financial backers of the bank will trust the intending bank manager. He has shown his utter reliability in moral matters by joining the Baptists.

4. WEBER: The voluntary nature of the association of Baptist members

Weber is here stressing the voluntary nature of the association of members amongst Baptists, and admires the way that this principle pervades every part of American life. Long before the Lutheran Theologian **Martin Marti** coined the phrase, 'The

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baptistification of America.’ **Weber** had observed that the Baptist spirit held sway in all sorts of associations whether religious, financial, or social. The rights the individual seeks to maintain his own position by becoming a member of the social group. The member is always seeking to prove himself or herself within the group in the circle of his associates. ‘So the association to which the individual belongs whether a church or something else is for him,’ he writes, ‘is never something organic, never a mystical total essence which gloats over him and envelopes him; rather he is always completely conscious of it as a mechanism for his own material and ideal ends.’ This individualism results in what **Weber** recognizes as a, ‘community forming energy.’

2B. A critique of WEBER’s position

1. Is voluntarism true to the Baptist vision and self consciousness?

Well: Laying stress on voluntarism **Weber** thus characterizes Baptists as a sect. Here we may pause, however, and ask whether the notion of a Christian community as a voluntary society does justice to the Baptist vision. Perhaps a particular spirit of association in an American society has shaped Baptist life there rather than the other way around. Certainly any Baptist would agree that one does not become a part of the Church of Christ merely by being born into it, and that faith cannot be co-erced, but is freely offered. Yet is the only alternative the polar opposite of choosing to join a Church? We shall return to this question when we consider the Theology of Covenant among early Baptists.

2. WEBER’s Church/Sect distinction only possible with an established church

Sociologists who followed **Weber** have generally been dis-satisfied for other reasons with the sharpness of his distinction between ‘sect’ and ‘church,’ and the application of ‘sect’ to such modern day groups as Baptists, Methodists, and Congregationalists. It seemed to them the distinction fails to match the situation in North America and much of Western Europe today where there is no established Church. Most theorists who have developed **Weber**’s description of a church have described it as having an attitude of acceptance towards the social environment. On this basis Baptists are clearly a church, as is clear from **Weber**’s own accounts of the legitimation of social values between Baptists and Society. Baptists and society in the United States of America agree on a separation between Church and State, and further: the baptized banker becomes credit-worthy!

3B. TROELTSCH: Church, Sect, Mysticism

1. TROELTSCH: ‘The Social teaching of the Christian Churches,’ 1912

Despite these difficulties of fitting the classification ‘church’ and ‘sect’ into the actual situation, the ‘church/sect’ distinction has exercised a fascination on the sociological mind, so that sociologists have adopted one or both of two strategies. They have either

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played variations on the two types to produce multiple variations: one sociologist for instance has recommended eleven types of religious organization; or they've created a spectrum with the two types at each end. Each religious community thus belongs somewhere on the spectrum, or mixes the types in different combinations. This approach was perhaps surprisingly anticipated by **Troeltsch** a friend and colleague of **Weber** who popularized the 'church/sect' classification in his massive two volume work published in 1912 called *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*. It is through reading **Troeltsch** rather than **Weber** that any appeal to the types is most often made. **Troeltsch** elaborates the description of two types with many more nuances than **Weber** and adds a third type: 'Mysticism'. Religious writers who will easily resort to the distinction 'church' and 'sect,' and apply the latter to Baptists, may them be upset to read in **Troeltsch** Baptists today do not show the form of a sect but a mixture of the two types in what **Troeltsch** prefers to call, a 'Free Church'. We must spend time exploring his account and hold it up against the story of Early Baptist life. But we should take warning here and now against a too ready acceptance of the label 'sect,' even in a sociological sense, given to Baptists by others especially when it is wrongly justified by appeal to 'church'.

2. 'Church' and 'sect' defined

In this paper I aim to show that on a spectrum Baptists are not at all close to the Sectarian end if we employ anything resembling **Troeltsch**'s definition, but closer to the 'church' end. We have the support of **Troeltsch** himself in the case of Modern Baptists, but can the same be said of Baptists in their origins? We can't get much further in answering this question without a brief summary of the characteristics that **Troeltsch** applies to 'church' and 'sect' respectively. **Troeltsch** found both these types to stem from the ministry of Jesus, but from two different aspects of it. 'The Church,' he thought, 'picks up the theme of Universalism, the nature of God as God of all Humankind, and the availability of the Gospel to all.' The 'sect' picks up on the high ethical demands of Jesus' Ministry, especially as found in the Sermon on the Mount.

3. An analysis of 'sect'

For **Troeltsch** the 'sect' interprets the teachings of Jesus in a literal and radical manner, and so is a small voluntary fellowship of converts who seek to realize the Divine law in their own behaviour. Since the individual enters the sect by conscious conversion, 'infant baptism,' **Troeltsch** writes, 'is almost always a stumbling block.' It is a community apart from and in opposition to the world around it. It emphasizes the eschatological features of Christian Doctrine, espouses the ideals of frugality and poverty, prohibits participation in legal or political affairs, and shuns any exercise of dominion over others. Religious equality of believers is stressed, and a sharp distinction between clergy and laity is not drawn. It appeals principally to the lower classes.

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4. An analysis of 'church'

The Church, thinks **Troeltsch** on the other hand stresses the redemptive and forgiving aspects of Christian tradition. It compromises the more radical teachings of Jesus and accepts many features of the secular world as at least relatively good. It seems to dominate all elements within society to teach and guide them, and to dispense Grace to them by means of Sacraments administered by Ecclesiastical office holders. Although it contains organized expressions of the radical spirit of Christianity in its Monastic system, it does not require all its members to realize the Divine Law in their own behaviour. It is Conservative and is allied with the Upper Classes.

5. The Anabaptists are the clearest example of 'sect' in Christian History

Troeltsch here indicates that whilst not all sects adopt 'Believers' Baptism' as a policy, infant baptism always produces strains for their vision of the Christian Community. In fact, he considers the Anabaptist Movement to be the clearest exemplification of a 'sect' in Christian History. To the types of 'sect' and 'church' adopted from **Weber**, **Troeltsch** adds a third: 'Mysticism,' which need not preoccupy us for the purposes of this unit.

6. Church, Sect, mysticism ... the sequential Christian story

(a) The thesis expounded and sequence explained

Now, it is essential to realize that for **Troeltsch** these three types were a way of understanding the historical development of the Church through different periods of time. He never intended them to be a typology of the Church in Modern times by which Christian groups as they existed today could simply be fitted into one type or another. We shouldn't expect to find either a church or a sect surviving in any full sense in our present day. In the earliest phase of the Christian Church, according to **Troeltsch**, the three tendencies of 'church,' 'sect,' and 'mysticism,' were still undifferentiated, intermingling in communities of Enthusiasm. **Troeltsch** does not refer, as does **Nigel Bright** in his book, *'Free Church, Free State,'* to the earliest Christian Communities as 'sects'. It takes a historical process to bring these tendencies into sharp expression in historical forms. As Christianity grows, it is forced to take a social shape in interaction with its environment in accord with its aim to make an impact on Society around, taking on, then, some kind of sociological form. Now **Troeltsch** does so sequentially as 'Church,' 'Sect,' 'Mysticism.' He's telling the developing story of Christianity.

(b) Church

So Christianity first adopts the social form of the Church whose high point is the Mediaeval Church of the Western Latin Rite – often known as the Mediaeval Catholic Church with its mission to serve large populations and to impose Christian beliefs and values on society. For **Troeltsch** this type has been declining for a long time. He has nostalgia for its vision of Christian civilization; abstractly he thinks it the superior form of organization of Christianity. But it no longer exists in its Mediaeval purity and it is

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of questionable relevance in our contemporary world. For a Church it is acceptable to be a mixed community of saints and sinners in order to have a universal character; but the sect emerges for **Troeltsh** in the Christian story as a protest against this accommodation.

(c) Sect: Baptists are an example

The Sect community must be of saints only, demanding Christian perfection of all its members. You find this definitive form, according to **Troeltsch**, in what he calls, 'The Baptist Movement'. Dealing with the sect type in Protestantism we find a whole section in **Troeltsch**'s work on 'The Baptist Movement' under which he treats the 'Anabaptists,' English General Baptists, and the Radical Baptists of the English Seventeenth Century Revolution as one continuous stream of sectarianism. **Troeltsch** sees the classic expression of the sect type in the aggressive Baptist sects of the Cromwellian Revolution and in other radical groups of that troubles period such as the Levellers who show Baptist characteristics.

4. TROELTSCH: the modern Baptist Free Church is not a sect

For **Troeltsch**, then, the modern social form of the Baptist movement cannot be fitted easily into the 'sect' type, since this reached its epitome in the English Revolution. After this period **Troeltsch** envisages the Baptists as developing into what he calls a 'Free Church.' He writes, 'Today it is more accurate to speak of Baptist Free Churches than Baptist Sects. He doesn't define the 'Free Church' as a special type of its own, viewing it rather as a new form of the 'church' type, though he does write that the free Church represents a great sociological collective type of the Christian idea. The 'Free Church' combines churchly and sectarian tendencies as a voluntary group that still maintains a church-like relation to society, wanting to be deeply involved in it and to serve it as a whole in all its diversity. While in continuity with the 'church' type the 'Free Church' differs profoundly from it since the 'Free Church' accepts religious toleration and relinquishes a claim to exclusiveness.

5. TROELTSCH: The Free Church the organized form of Ascetic Protestantism

However, **Troeltsch** sees the multiplicity of Free Churches as ranking alongside Mediaeval Catholicism in social impact, 'constituting,' he says, 'the second great main type of Christian Social Doctrine. The Free Church is the organizational form of ascetic Protestantism,' an idea inherited from **Weber**, that is, personal spiritual discipline, and this holds Protestant Free Churches together across the world in all their variety and differences. It is not unified as an institution like the Church, but it is still, he judges, a great unity which can only be compared with the social philosophy of the Middle Ages.

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6. TROELTSCH: The Free Churches: Calvinism, Baptists, Bourgeoisies society

(a) Free Church bound up with Calvinism and Baptist

Troeltsch does see the emergence of the 'Free Church' as bound up with two historic forces; Calvinism; and the Baptist Sects.' The Baptist Movement has not only developed into a Free Church, in his view, but assisted at its very birth. On the one hand Reformed or Calvinist Churches gave up the attempt to control the Christian quality of the state to establishing the Church, and were content to be 'free' over against the State, rejecting State interference.

(b) The Baptist movement gradually adapted to Bourgeoisies society

On the other hand the Baptist Movement in its non-aggressive form gradually adapted, in **Troeltsch**'s view to Bourgois society and to a recognition of the State of Law and of economic life. It also made a notable contribution to the ethos of a Free Church by working out the principle of 'Religious Toleration,' 'always a difficult concept,' he says, 'for the Reformed Church, and which was finally firmly established under the influence of **Locke**. For the sake of the future of Christianity and its impact on society **Troeltsch** is looking for some new blend of the three types: Church, Sect, Mysticism. Meanwhile, however, he judges that the Free Churches offer the most effective synthesis up to this point, and far from being a sect Modern Baptists are a prime instance of this form of social organization.

7. DAVID MARTIN: Troeltsch critiqued: The Baptists were never a sect

Whilst **Troeltsch** himself finds features of a 'Free Church' developing after the English Revolution, I now wish to ask whether this character might be traced to the very origins of Baptist life: that is, we might find **Troeltsch**'s account of the blending of the characteristics in the Free Church quite convincing whilst questioning his account of the development of the Baptists from a Sect to a Free Church. This enquiry is in tune with the proposal of the sociologist **David Martin** that the denominations in the United States of America and in Great Britain (by which he means mainly Baptists, Methodists, and Congregationalists) were never sects, and that the category of denominations should be established as a permanent type alongside 'sect' and 'church'.

C. FIDDES: A TEST OF MARTIN: THE BAPTISTS WERE NEVER A SECT

1C. The Baptists in the religious zeitgeist of 1608 Ansterdam

1. Our analysis: Are the Baptists free church, not sect, from origin?

I now propose to test out **Martin**'s thesis by some reflection on the **Smyth-Helwys** congregation in Amsterdam both in its initial unity, and then in its subsequent division. Might it be more accurate to call this either a 'Free-Church' to use **Troeltsch**'s term, or a 'denomination' to use **Martin**'s term, rather than a 'sect'?

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2. Exclusive? The Baptist gatherings in GUNTER's great bakehouse

When the congregation led by **John Smyth** and **Thomas Helwys** left Gainsborough and arrived in Amsterdam, probably in August 1608, they kept themselves to themselves, although exactly where they did it remains something of a mystery. We can't be sure that they had yet been given hospitality in the great bakehouse belonging to **Jan Gunter** a member of the Waterlander Mennonite Congregation, although they were certainly installed there in 1609. Now, because you have had a lot in this series of units about Baptists in Amsterdam, I will say a bit more about it. The bakehouse was in Bakers' Street, the buildings on its site today include a Chinese massage parlour, a Chinese restaurant, and it faces Rembrandt Square which is a place where much of the night life of Amsterdam takes place. I went to the place and broke bread just about where the early congregation would have broken bread in the great bakehouse (N.B.: This is a Baptist term for celebrating their Lord's Supper.)

3. The 'Gathered Church' and denominational scene in Amsterdam, 1608

Now: The **Smyth-Helwys** congregation had arrived on an immensely varied and very confusing religious scene which included the State Church of the Dutch Reformed, the English Reformed, Mennonites of two groups, Roman Catholics, and an existing congregation of English Separatists called 'The Ancient Church' led by **Francis Johnson** and by **Smyth's** old Cambridge tutor **Henry Ainsworth**. They were also accompanied by a closely linked congregation from Scruby just down the road from Gainsborough, whose pastor was **John Robinson**.

2C. How far were the Baptists Ascetic Protestants? An interdenominational test

1. The issue

Now: Given this context, just how sectarian was the **Smyth-Helwys** congregation? How exclusive was it? Did it show any traits of the recognition of other Christian congregations that is typical of the 'Free Church' in its vision of Spiritual Unity within what both **Weber** and **Troeltsch** call 'Ascetic Protestantism'?

2. The Baptists and the English Reformed Church

Well: It wasn't surprising that the new arrivals steered well clear of the 'English Reformed Church' whose congregation included English Protestant merchants, Scottish Presbyterian soldiers, and former Separatists who wanted a better social standing. This Reformed Church existed under the local consistory of the Dutch Reformed Church and so was part of the early Calvinistic experiment in establishing the Church in the State giving magistrates power to decide in Church matters. In fact, the English Reformed met in a Church given to them in 1607 by the City Council which was situated in the Beginhoff. This is the enclosure of a highly respected community of Roman Catholic Lay Sisters known as the 'Begins'. Technically it was in fact the Chapel of the Begins

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from which they had been expelled in 1578, although the sisters went on living around it in the enclosure. The Begins were allowed their own chapel rather later in 1671, and this was built in a private house facing the main door of what was their former chapel and was now the English Reformed Church. As they were some twenty yards apart from the building where **Smyth** and **Helwys** were, one can only think that members of these congregations must have met. Under a limited policy of toleration Catholics like the Mennonites and Separatists were permitted their own worship by the City Council as long as they had no public visibility as a Church. It is somewhat ironic that for English exiles seeking religious freedom, some of them ended up worshipping in a building confiscated from others, although to become members they had to disavow any Separatist past. Given the conditions of the time it would be unfair to stress the sectarian nature of hostility to the Reformed Church by the **Smyth-Helwys** congregation, especially as this was mutual. After all, the English Reformed were condoning the entanglement between Church and Civil authorities, and any attempt in imposing a Christian social order, the Free Church opposes. This opposition was at the heart of **Thomas Helwys's** book, *'The Mystery of Iniquity,'* published in Amsterdam in 1612 protesting against the king's appointment of bishops and archbishops who claimed to make Spiritual Laws for the Church.

3. The Baptists and the Separatist 'Ancient Church'

It may seem more surprising that the **Smyth-Helwys** congregation did not join the existing congregation of the Separatists known as 'The Ancient Church'. However, **James Coggins** makes the point that there was no reason to do so. Each congregation was bound by its own covenant in a typically Separatist way, and there was a preference for groups small enough to be able to exercise mutual covenantal care for each other.

4. Divisions amongst the first Baptists

If the **Smyth-Helwys** and the **Robinson** congregations were at first intermingled as seems likely, then they probably already numbered about a hundred and fifty people. More disturbing was the breaching of fellowship with the Ancient Church within a couple of months of arrival marked by **Smyth's** pamphlet, *'The differences of the Churches of the Separation'* published in 1608. As **Coggins** had suggested, this inevitably will have led to the breach between the **Smyth-Helwys** and the **Robinson** congregations in the same year, although they had both more or less come from the same area – that of Gainsborough-Scrubby. It may well have led to the breach between them with **John Robinson** taking a mediating position between **Smyth** and **Ainsworth** in their public quarrel, and then deciding to leave with the majority of the new arrivals for a more peaceful life in Leiden, Netherlands, in 1609. Perhaps the decision to adopt 'Believers' Baptism' by **Smyth** and **Helwys** in 1609 accelerated **Robinson's** departure and added more members to his congregation from their own. By the time of the preface to *'The Character of the Beast'* (1609), **Smyth** is declaring that the **Ainsworth** congregation, the Ancient Church, was not just a disobedient Church but a false one.

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5. A split in the Smyth-Helwys congregation

The **Smyth-Helwys** congregation itself was then to suffer a further split one year later in 1610 as **Helwys** and about ten other members left **Smyth** in protest against his pending application to join the Waterlander Mennonites. Deeply hurt by what they felt to be a desertion of their cause they excommunicated **Smith**, refused even to speak to his followers, and finally returned to England to found the first Baptist Church on English soil.

6. The Baptists and the Waterlander Mennonites

Now, the Church of the Waterlander Mennonites, who were of course people thinking of themselves as Baptists though no record of that exists, met in a warehouse on the Zwingel Canal. They were located by a tower which stood on a bridge with a dungeon underneath! Later on they joined with the other Mennonite congregation in Amsterdam who were Flemish Mennonites (i.e.: from the border country between France and Belgium in Europe which to this day speaks its own language 'Flemish') in about 1678, but this does not date back proper to our period.

3C. SMYTH, The Smyth-Helwys congregation split, and Covenant

1. Smyth and his congregation in momentum towards the Free Church ideal

This rather sorry story of disagreements and splits within just two years of their new life in Amsterdam may seem to confirm the nature of the **Smyth-Helwys** congregation as a sect, anxious as sects are for the purity of the congregation, seeking to realize the Divine law in their own life through strict discipline. **Smyth's** decision to baptize himself and then the others, having become convinced that a truly New Testament Church can only be entered through 'Believers' Baptism' seems only to confirm the identity of a sect. Even **Smyth's** own congregation, it seems, was no longer a true Gospel Church, must be dissolved along with its Spiritual Leadership and had to be restarted from a new act of obedience. What then are we to make of a proposition of faith issued by **Smyth's** congregation after his death based on a draft written by **Smyth** himself? Clause 69 reads like this: 'That all penitent and faithful Christians are brethren in the communion of the outward Church, wheresoever they live, by what name so ever they are known, which in truth and zeal follow repentance and faith, though compassed with never-so-many ignorances and infirmities, and we salute them all with an holy kiss being heartily grieved that we who follow after one faith and one spirit one Lord and one God one body and one baptism should be ribbed into so many sects and schisms, and that only for matters of little moment.' This proposition breathes the air of the 'Free Church' as it came to be. It is, I suggest, grounded in a Theological insight of **Smyth** that gives his congregation the momentum towards a 'Free Church' ideal and an underlying dynamic which is there despite their sectarian behaviour. I mean a Theology of Covenant which **Smyth** worked out in his books both before and after his turn to embrace 'Believers' Baptism'.

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2. 'Covenant': What Smyth and his posthumous publications meant by it

The term 'covenant' at that time carried several meanings.

(1) It was, first, the Eternal Covenant of Grace which God has made with Human Beings and with angels for their Salvation in Jesus Christ. This is the most profound idea of Covenant, the New Covenant sealed by the death of Christ.

(2) Second: The term 'Covenant' could refer to an agreement that God makes corporately with His Church or with individual Churches; and here writers tended to appeal to the covenant formula of God with Israel: 'I will be their God, and they shall be My People,' and its forms in the New Testament referring to the Church.

(3) Third: Among the Separatists the term took on a new meaning: that of a document of agreement taken, undertaken, and signed by Church members when forming or entering a particular local Church. The Church was constituted by a covenant which had two dimensions: vertical; and horizontal; i.e.: with God; and with fellow-members. Like other Separatists **Smyth** defines a Church by this way of gathering it. It is he says, 'a visible communion of saints is of two, three or more saints joined together by covenant with God and themselves.'

(4) For the Separatists, and the Baptists in their turn, this double dimension of the covenant, with each other and with God, meant that the local congregation was under the direct rule of Christ, and so it had been given the seals of the covenant, that is, the freedom and the power to elect its own ministry discernible in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper and to administer discipline, i.e.: the authority to bind and loose.

3. Two understandings of Covenant fused: a Sectarian understanding

However, it seems that **Smyth** took the quite original step of deepening the vertical dimension into the first meaning of covenant, that is, the Eternal, Gracious Act of God in Salvation. 'God's part in the vow, promise, oath, or covenant of the visible Church,' he writes, 'is to give Christ, and with Christ all things else.' 'Through the Covenant bond the Lord chose us to be His,' he writes, 'by virtue of the covenant God made with us, God is our God and our Father only in Christ and through Him, and all the promises of God in Christ are, 'Yes!' and 'Amen!'' So: When the Church makes its covenant promise signing the document, it receives the promise of God, and this promise is nothing less than the covenant of Grace. 'We say,' writes **Smyth**, 'the Church or two or three faithful people separated from the world and joined together in a true covenant have both Christ, the covenant, and the promises. The way that the Eternal and local aspects of the covenant are connected remains unsystematic in **Smyth** and indeed in most subsequent Baptist thinking. But **Barry White** is surely right to find a stroke of originality by **Smyth** in fusing the two together, maintaining that, 'It seems for **Smyth** that in the covenant promise of the local congregation the Eternal covenant of Grace became contemporary as human acceptance of it was actualized in history.'

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4. The Baptists critique WEBER's voluntarism/institution alternatives

Now, this Theology of covenant has a powerful momentum within it. If the covenant is rooted in God's Eternal degree/decreed in Christ, then Christ is the only covenant mediator in the Church, and the local covenant cannot be conceived as a merely voluntary agreement among members. The alternatives of **Weber** we began with, between voluntarism and institution are not exhaustive after all. Believers gather because they are gathered, they make an agreement in response to a Call. The implications of the covenant here are twofold. On the one hand the rooting of the covenant eternally in Christ means that there is something organic about the Baptist view of Church, to use **Weber's** term for what he regards as the 'Church type'. Although the local congregation is the body of Christ there is also the whole body of Christ which precedes and embraces its local manifestation. God's eternal covenant with humankind in Christ pre-exists the local covenant bond. Second, therefore, the local Church must always be aware of the Church universal, as is characteristic of the later 'free Church,' it must reach out for relations with others and set itself in a wider context of mutual recognition. There is a hint of this attitude to others not only in the confession of the **Smyth** faction at Amsterdam, but also of the **Helwys** group after the split. In its 'Declaration of Faith' of 1611 it affirms, 'that as one congregation hath Christ, so hath all. And the word of God cometh not out from any one, neither to any one congregation in particular.' Admittedly, **Helwys** is probably thinking of congregations holding the same convictions as his own, but there is a Theological basis here for the later associating of Baptist Churches together, and even for the extension of the association principle to other Christian confessions. **Smyth's** Covenant Theology is naturally supported by his adoption and doctrine of 'Believers' Baptism' and might even be a factor leading to that momentous decision. Churches are gathered not only by covenant, but by the baptism of those who are making the agreement, and in that baptism God is taking the initiative in offering Salvation. It isn't just a sign of personal decision as **Weber** thought it was.

5. The 1611 confession

In the 'Confession' of 1611 signed by **Smyth** and his congregation, 'The Lord Jesus doth inwardly baptize the repentant faithful man in the laver of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.' In baptism as in covenant, Divine and Human dimensions come together, so that **Helwys** can criticize the Separatist understanding of 'covenant' as 'only a voluntary profession of the faith.' They, and **John Robinson** among them urges **Helwys**, 'Do not understand that a voluntary profession isn't sufficient without baptism. For God's covenant consists in the promise that, **'They which believe and are baptised shall be saved.'**

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4C. A perspective expounded

1. Early Baptist Covenant and Believer Baptism instigated a free church ethos

The forming of the Church by covenant among the Separatists had led an extreme emphasis on the autonomy of each congregation each with its own covenant. Among the Mennonites 'Believers' Baptism' tied congregations together, since members could be transferred from one congregation to another on the basis of their baptism. Again we see something original happening among these early Baptists, combining a Theology of Covenant with Baptism creating a momentum which would open up the boundaries of covenant to an ethos which that recognizable as a 'Free Church.' I suggest that we can also detect this ethos in **Smyth**'s approach to the Mennonites for the admission of his congregation, the act which caused the bitter separation of **Helwys** and his small group. I don't mean of course that making an alliance with the Mennonites would be making an inter-denominationalism that characterizes a Free Church. The Mennonites at this point were clearly recognizable as a sect in **Troeltsch**'s terms, not least for their refusal to take public oaths and their denial that Christian disciples could serve as magistrates and wield the sword. I mean the reason that **Smyth** gave for his action which was not understood by **Helwys**.

2. Smyth questions his own baptism, Helwys says 'You've returned to the Popish'

When **Smyth** came to believe that he had made a mistake in baptizing himself rather than going to the Mennonites for baptism, **Helwys** saw **Smyth** as 'returning to the Popish doctrine of succession,' the passing down of true ordination and baptism from the apostles through a line of ministry to the present. **Smyth**, however, continued to believe that it was legitimate in some circumstances for a congregation to begin baptism over again when true baptism had been lost. He came to feel that since there was a congregation to hand which was practicing New Testament baptism, and where there were 'ministers established whence baptism may orderly be had' their action had been 'disorderly and inappropriate.'

3. SMYTH: The only succession is the succession of Truth

Smyth makes a final attempt at explaining his view to **Helwys** in his 'Retractions and Confirmations' when he writes, 'I deny all succession except in the truth. But it is not lawful for everyone who seeth the truth to baptize, for then there might be as many churches as couples in the world. And none had anything to do with another which breaketh the bond of love and brotherhood in churches.' Similarly **Smyth**'s congregation explained its view in 1612: 'There is no succession in the outward church, but all succession is from heaven. For God is not the God of confusion, but of order. And therefore we are I the outward church to draw as near the first institution as may be in all things. Therefore it is not lawful for every brother to administer the word and sacraments.' These appeals against a proliferating of new churches to the bond of love between the churches and to the need to 'draw as near to the first institution as may be,'

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are all precursors of the denomination, according to **Martin**, or the Free Church, according to **Troeltsch**. Such an attitude, I suggest, is finally grounded in the distinctive view of covenant held by **Smyth** and **Helwys**, although **Smyth** could not follow **Helwys** in his rather fine distinctions.

5C Baptists as sect?

1. Baptists do not fit TROELTSCH's analysis of sect

But there is another aspect of **Smyth** and **Helwys**'s congregations that fit uneasily with **Smyth**'s account of a sect. In matters of Church and Society **Troeltsch** find Free Churches combining three elements: (1) A strong objection to any interference of the State in Church matters; (2) A defense of general religious toleration; (3) and a strong commitment to engagement in society which is rather similar to that of the Church. A sect is likely to object to state interference in matters of belief and worship but is unlikely to commend general toleration since it believes that it has found the truth so that it is either detached from secular society or hostile to it. This detachment from the world, observes **Troeltsch**, is expressed by the refusal to use the law to swear oaths in a court of justice, to exercise authority over others, or to take part in war. These issues took form in the beginning of the Seventeenth Century in attitudes towards the office of magistrate, and the rule of the Godly prince. We can I suggest see in the burgeoning Baptist movement the blend of the three elements that are typical of the Free Church.

2. The principles of non-interference, divine right of the king, and their extent

First: The principle of non-interference had to be established. Then typical of a sect, it would be carried through into the Free Church. It seems that the **Smyth-Helwys** congregation learnt from the Mennonites the principle that the State should have no authority in the Spiritual Kingdom of Christ. While magistrates and kings were to be honoured and obeyed as a permissive Divine Ordinance to inhibit evil and encourage the good, they were not to make Spiritual laws about right belief and worship, nor appoint bishops to do so. In **Helwys**'s formulation in his book, *'The Mystery of Iniquity'* the state could not bind God-given conscience. 'God,' he writes, 'has given to the king a kingdom with all earthly power against which none may resist. Christ alone is King of Israel and sits upon David's throne, and the king ought to be a subject of His Kingdom.' This denial of Spiritual jurisdiction to the king and magistrates was not typical of the Separatists as a whole. The *'True Confession'* of 1596 drawn up by the **Ainsworth** congregation in Amsterdam declares that, 'magistrates exercise powers to root out by their authority all false ministries, voluntary religions, and counterfeit worship of God,' and on the other hand, 'to establish and maintain by their laws every part of God's word.' Yet by 1612 confessions of both the **Smyth** and **Helwys** groups are emphatic that magistrates have no authority in the Spiritual Kingdom.

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3. Toleration

In **Smyth**'s congregation this means a demand of toleration for all people professing to be Christian. He writes, 'The magistrate is not by virtue of his office to meddle with religion, or matters of conscience to force or compel men to this or that form of religion or doctrine, but to leave the Christian Religion free to every man's conscience and to handle only civil transgressions. **Helwys** took the argument further pleading explicitly for toleration of all people of any faith or none in his famous words, 'Hereticks, Turks, Jews, or whatsoever.' English Baptists, then, beginning from the General Baptists in 1612 had made pleas for freedom of conscience and general toleration. With the **Helwys** group this was also combined with a full commitment to participation in society, unlike the Mennonites and differing from **John Smyth** in his views from 1610 onwards, they asserted that Christian disciples could be appointed as magistrates and also swear public oaths where this would prevent conflict arising. For **Helwys** this was a matter of Divine Justice. If God has ordained government, He can't be so unfair as to condemn those who obey Him by governing, or exclude them from the fellowship of the Church. The **Helwys** group of General Baptists had within three years of becoming a Baptist Church between 1609 and 1612 formulated an approach to society which was recognizably Free Church in at least a rudimentary form.

4. Baptist Covenant Theology source of (new) Baptist toleration and engagement

Whilst the **Smyth** group didn't follow it, the **Helwys** congregation was heavily dependent on **Smyth**'s thought for its general direction. So from where did this somewhat unsystematic blend of ideas actually come - Non interference, toleration, and engagement? I suggest that it arose from the momentum of Baptist Covenant Theology as I have described it, with a more intense vertical dimension in the covenant of a local Church than in Separatist Theology. Fusing the local and eternal covenants, the rule of Christ becomes a more pervasive and controlling theme; the rule of Christ which he willingly and controllingly shares with the whole congregation of faithful disciples cannot be transferred either to the king or to spiritual lords who the king appoints. The fact however that Christ *gives* earthly rule to the king and magistrates means that the Christian disciples can also participate in this gift by taking secular office if they have the opportunity. If the magistrate is an holy ordinance as both Mennonites and **John Smyth** confess, therefore, says **Helwys**, they may be members of the Church of Christ. There is a strong participatory sense here. As disciples share in Christ's rule in the Church, so they may share in His rule in the state which He has delegated to human beings.

5. A Conclusion: In behavior a sect, in Covenant Theology Free Church

Let's sum up. **Troeltsch**'s category of 'Free Church' presumes Baptists of the present day will be closer to 'church' than to 'sect,' while combining aspects of the 'church,' 'sect,' and 'mystical' types of social organization. **Weber**'s earlier designation of 'Baptist' as a sect seems to have been due to his almost exclusive focus on the earlier

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element of voluntarism, which, I have argued, to be not only too narrow a description, as **Troeltsch**'s work demonstrates, but one which doesn't exactly fit the Baptist Theology of Covenant which was formed by the early thought of **John Smyth** and **Thomas Helwys**. **Troeltsch** himself saw the Baptists as developing from a sect into a Free Church during the course of the Seventeenth Century. I have argued that the distinctive traits of the Free Church *can* in fact already be seen in the **Smyth** and **Helwys** congregations, although to varying degrees. Under **Helwys** in particular, early English Baptists show a remarkable combination of features quite unique for their time. Covenant Theology from the Separatists is combined with 'Believers' Baptism' so enabling the characteristic balance and tension in Baptist life between the freedom of the local congregation and association with others in a wider sense of 'church'. A willingness to engage as individuals in the structures of government or state characteristic of the Separatists is combined with the Mennonite denial that kings or magistrates have any jurisdiction in spiritual matters leading to a defense of general toleration that is ahead of its time. Whilst their behaviour sometimes shows the marks of a sect, the Covenant Theology of the earliest Baptists supplied a momentum towards Free Church which was unstoppable.
